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Essays on the Problem of Life after Death

BY

THE REV. THEODORE MAINAGE, O.P.
PROFESSOR IN THE INSTITUT CATHOLIQUE
OF PARIS

Translated from the Fourth French Edition
BY THE REV. J. M. LELEN

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IMMORTALITY

ESSAYS ON THE PROBLEM OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

I

THE TESTIMONY OF THE UNIVERSE

There is no need to prove how important and timely is the study which we here undertake. Everywhere and always, man has pondered over the destiny which awaits him after death, and has attentively listened to those who would speak to him of the mystery of the hereafter. But to-day, when the anarchy of ideas is restlessly spreading everywhere, when men and women are feverishly seeking to find new roads to "the other world," when many others, weary and worn, desperately hurl themselves into the rut of materialism or become mournfully indifferent to the most essential questions of the soul—it is surely opportune to restate the truth concerning facts which, for lack of being seen as they really are, cause doubt and anguish to some and elicit a smile of incredulity from others.

Who knows whether this pretended scepticism does not veil an unavowed sorrow? Oftentimes one despises life because one has been deceived by it. The fact merely proves that one still loves it. Oftentimes, too, the thought of the hereafter is despised merely because of its mysteriousness. But in affecting to ignore it we show that it still has a hold on us. Though we may look at it disdainfully or pseudo-scientifically, and dub it pietistic or phantasmagoric, the problem remains and dominates us. We have to face it in spite of ourselves, every time a relative or dear friend is stricken by death.

Again and again the question arises: Does the kiss we imprint on the brow of our dear dead ones stand for an eternal farewell or does it presage the hope of a future reunion? Is our earthly existence more comprehensible and more beautiful if it is a rapid march toward nothingness? Is survival after death a matter that concerns this present life or not?

To these questions Christianity brings an answer unanimously accepted by the Ages of Faith. But many look upon this answer with suspicion and pretend that it rests on a basis not sufficiently supported by reason. It is to these sceptics I dedicate these pages.

I approach the problem of Immortality as a philosopher guided by the light of natural reason. I purpose to gather and restate all the arguments which establish the rational basis of Christian belief in the immortality of the soul, leaving to the conscience of my unbelieving readers the task of pursuing from the viewpoint of faith a study started from the viewpoint of reason. My task is merely to clear the way for further investigation.

Before entering into the subject it seems indispensable to make two preliminary remarks.

The first is this: according to the rules of good sense and intellectual loyalty we must not ask from an argument more than it can give. In other words, we must acknowledge that an answer may be more or less inadequate. On the other hand we should bear in mind that secondary arguments are not to be neglected. Singly, apart from one another, they may not compel full assent; but taken all together and brought to a point of convergence, they increase the probability. And if to this imposing mass of probabilities or subsidiary proofs is added a decisive proof, the whole structure gains sufficient solidity to satisfy the most severe requirements.

Practically, this preliminary remark is designed to forestall the temptation, which may come to some overcritical minds, to go no farther if everything is not dazzlingly clear from the very start. The roads of reason are laborious. Anyone who desires to read these pages will do well to read them through to the last.

The second remark is, that in the course of our study we shall have to mention, at least in a general way, certain positions adopted by modern philosophy, history, and psychology. Of course, as a Catholic priest, it would be ingenuous for me to declare at every turn which of those positions I prefer. Hence if I let this or that objection pass without an *ex-professo* refutation—the weak points will always be indicated—it is because I wish to show how these objections, supposedly new, but in reality as old as the world, far from eliminating the problem of life after death, as they are fondly expected to do, only make us more keenly aware of it, even if, nay particularly when, they affect to ignore it.

This twofold observation applies especially to the topic of this first essay, namely, the testimony of the human race in favor of Immortality.

I

Is it possible to derive from the universe, in the midst of which our earth occupies such a tiny place, any indication concerning the problem of life after death? Is it not rather imprudent to drag the debate into a region which is above all one of measurable quantities and where, as a result, Materialism can easily be victorious?

What does it matter to the Universe whether the living atoms, hitched to the side of the little planet which whirls us through limitless space, endure or not, whether or not they escape that law which seems to impose a perpetual change upon nature and an end upon everything which exists and has had a beginning?

The pretension appears paradoxical, nay, disquieting. For if the question of life after death has a meaning and if it offers food for hope, it is on condition of affecting the destiny of the human personality.

It is sheer mockery to open to us the gates of a so-called "beyond," where conscience will be abolished, where the "ego" will resolve itself into an amorphous substance or into some sort of transcendental "I," which will be the only kind of conscience existing in the Cosmos. Between the Pantheism of Spinoza or Schleiermacher, and the Monism of Haeckel, there is scarcely any difference from this point of view. To survive as part of a whole or to restore to matter all the constitutive parts of individuality, is practically the same thing.

Here arises the great difficulty, the massive objection which the Universe raises against our dream of survival and immortality. Is it not evident that Nature (the term is inaccurate, but consecrated by usage) has not the slightest care for individuals? It calls them into being; it utilizes them; but when they are worn out, it casts them away.

Consider first of all the world of inanimate beings. In the depths of the sidereal universe a solar system begins to take shape. Each of the stars which compose it is a sun. Gradually the secondary suns solidify and become planets. The central globe alone remains luminous, illumines and vivifies the sidereal family grouped around it. But in course of time it, too, cools off and grows dim. Thus the cycle is completed. A train of tombs now floats in the darkness of immensity. Does "Nature" care? Not at all. Stern and impassible, she pursues her course. When one focus becomes extinct, she lights another. And thus she passes from sun to sun, indifferent to the numberless dead of worlds strewn along her path. They have served their purpose; they no longer count.

Secondly, consider the cycle of life. It offers the same spectacle. Life is vegetable or animal. It animates the lily of the field, the majestic tree of the forest, the capering fawn, the swallow which brings tidings of the coming spring. Mirth and hope? Wait and see. Whither do these living beings tend? Do they enjoy the spark of life granted to them? Perhaps they do. But this enjoyment is subordinate to another end. They are drawn and urged by an invisible force to perpetuate and reproduce themselves. From the hysop to the cedar, from the elementary cell to the giant organism, on all steps of the vital ladder, we witness the same blind urge, the same mysterious instinct. And when each living being has transmitted the torch of life, it disappears. The lily fades, the tree withers, the swallow returns no more. They have played their part. Through them Nature, which alone does not die, from day to day escapes annihilation. But they, the servants of a day, pass away. New generations walk on their ashes and unconsciously trample on the dead.

How shall we conceive the destiny of man, having before us this vision of a Cosmos where the individual counts for so little? Assuredly collective humanity is not a myth; we cannot grant to it an existence separate from the members which integrate it; neither can we assert that it is a meaningless abstraction. Wherever they meet, human individuals congregate and start a common work, more or less perfect, more or less worth while, in the interest of civilization. And this common work allows us to assign to each particular group its just rank in the history of the race. The annals of Egypt, of Chaldea, of Greece, and of Rome are pages of a large volume whose chapters go on accumulating from century to century, from millennium to millennium, each chapter written with the collaboration of numberless individuals, whose bones have filled innumerable graveyards. And each tale is so characteristic that it seems to have been the destiny of that particular people to write it for the purpose of adding a new trait to the physiognomy of mankind as a whole.

If we are gifted with some optimism, we may go a step farther and pretend that, in a civilizing group, and in the whole *ensemble* of human civilizations, every individual who appears on the stage of the world plays a certain part. It may be insignificant or glorious, beneficent or nefarious: but it is a part, and if it were omitted, the drama would be incomplete or could not have been produced at all. Whoever we may be, great or little, rich or poor, ignorant or learned, there is a reason for our existence in the drama of history, and each one of us is a means necessary to fulfil the collective mission of our clan, country, species.

But how can we be sure that, having played our part, we shall not wholly disappear to make room for other individuals who will take up the task where we have left it, and will disappear in their turn, like the planetary systems and the living organisms?

You say, we crave for life after death. Why, pray, since our work is finished, and the formidable energy which sows the suns above and animates the cells here below, has and always will have plenty of workers to take our place? What more can we expect? We are no longer useful, but threaten to become a burden. We have served, we are worn out, the tool is broken. Let us have the courage to go without hope of returning after having woven our little spool of thread into the anonymous tissue. Among men, as elsewhere in nature, the individual is nothing. The only possible survival is that of humanity itself, and it is a relative survival if it be true that humanity is only a passing phase of that implacable Nature which ever transforms itself and ever progresses onward.

Thus, on earth as in the heavens, life calls for life, but each individual response to that call ends in a wail of agony, death, and annihilation.

That is the way in which the Universe looks on our longing for immortality! Needless to ask more questions. We cannot get anywhere by following this trail. Let us proceed by another path; but, for mercy's sake, let us keep away from the insatiable whirlpool which swallows individual existences before our eyes.

2

We will not recoil from our task because we cannot accept that pessimistic concept of the Universe that is so prevalent nowadays, and offers itself as the logical consequence and the ineluctable conquest of modern Science.

To demonstrate the weakness of this concept it will not be necessary to introduce—as we should be justified in doing—the idea of Divine Providence, of which "Nature," thanks to a series of *a priori* presuppositions, has become a caricature or the very antithesis.

Our opponents claim that they stick to facts and to direct experience. So do we. You have heard the accusation; now listen to the defense.

After all, the heart of the problem is in the individual and his true rôle in the bosom of the Cosmos.

Is the individual merely a toy, an implement, which is cast away after use? Does he hold the rank of a slave, or has he a right to a much higher place in Nature, as an object of unselfish care, clemency, sweetness, and humaneness?

If—having rid myself of any scientific prejudice—I look on the Universe, I am compelled to acknowledge a fact whose importance has to be admitted by all. It is this: The general movement of the Universe tends towards individuality. I do not say towards individualism, that is, the disaggregation of collective wholes and their separation into their component parts; for in Nature there is no surer principle than that of association. What I mean is that the tendency of the Universe, generally speaking, and as far as we can observe it, is to emerge from confusion and chaos, to pass from the indeterminate to the determinate, to produce little by little organisms that are more and more differentiated, individualities that are more and more distinct, and enjoy, amidst the system or group of which they form a part, the autonomy befitting their nature.

Here are a few illustrations of this law. A little while ago we spoke of the heavens. Let us return to that subject and draw a few lessons from it.

On a beautiful evening we have viewed the stars that light up the firmament. At first we saw no order in the disposition or, rather, the dispersion of these innumerable and unequal fires. It is easy to discern the classic constellations: the Great Bear and the Little Bear (Ursa Major and Ursa Minor), the Lion (Leo), Andromeda and Pegasus, Orion, and the others. But we well know that these constellations represent only an arbitrary and artificial classification and that it is scarcely possible to discover in them the figures lent to them by the imagination of our ancestors.

Nevertheless even a single glance reveals indications of order and harmony. In the heart of summer, after sunset, when the twilight ceases, we behold an immense arch spanning the horizon—pale, irregularly shaped. It is the Milky Way, or Galaxy.

If our eyes were stronger, we could see other wonders. Here are nebulous, formless, cloud-like masses, cleft into monstrous branches. There, graceful spirals, globules, rings and zones. Elsewhere, clusters of stars in such close array that it would be difficult to separate them; and their scintillations resemble the sparkling of suns. Again, elsewhere are systems of double, triple, multiple stars, offering all shades of color, from dead red to sombre violet, from living white to azure blue.

What is the secret of these diverse formations? Have they been hurled at random into space, with no tie holding them together? Not at all. Modern Science, with an almost miraculous patience and cleverness, has been able, little by little, to disentangle that skein of light. The task is not yet finished, but it is far enough advanced to allow us to make impressive and suggestive generalizations.

In reality, as William Herschel remarked over a century ago, the sky places before our eyes simultaneously the successive phases of the world's history. These phases can be deciphered, and here are the conclusions arrived at by Science:

First, our sun is part of a cluster or stream of stars relatively near to us—I say, relatively, for the nearest of them are still billions of miles distant from our planetary archipelago.

This sidereal stream is connected with what is now called the Galactic system, that milky arch which we admired a little while ago, and which marks the frontiers, situated several thousands of light years away from us.

The Milky Way, when examined with a powerful telescope, resolves itself into enormous masses of stars or nebulous bodies. It also comprises all the visible stars and hundreds of groups of stars. Curiously enough, its apparent form can scarcely be explained except in connection with spiral nebulæ. In other words, the aspect of the Milky Way results from the projection upon the sky of gigantic spirals. Our sun is several hundred light years distant from the centre of convergence. And this fact has given rise to the fruitful hypothesis that the other spiral nebulæ—flickering so profusely in space—they are from 500,000 to 1,000,000 in number—are as many Milky Ways, separated by enormous distances. And as our Galactic system, taken as a whole, and all similar spirals, run at tremendous speed, it is not impossible that this army of nebulæ constitutes a unique system, the system we call the Universe, unless beyond the regions accessible to our investigation there are other systems, formed of hundreds of thousands of Milky Ways, in the unfathomable depths of space.

Such is the Cosmos from a topographic and static point of view. But this Cosmos moves and constantly transforms itself, and it is the meaning of its movements which interests us above all. Here also, equipped with its powerful means of exploration, Science has been able to establish a few guiding marks, a few signs indicating the order in which new worlds come into being.

The most ancient stages of the process are represented by irregularly shaped chaotic nebulæ, agitated, fluttering, and seeking their way. By and by these unruly movements submit to the law of equilibrium; gyratory currents become perceptible, and—of the time it takes we know nothing—spirals appear. The chaos assumes various shapes. Then, in the midst of each spiral, nodes are formed, similar to the scars on the tentacles of a huge octopus. Each of these nodes contains the germ and promise of a smaller and more clearly delimited universe in the midst of the greater. This lesser universe is, perhaps, composed of nebular fragments, each of which gives birth to a particular system, comprising one or several conjugated suns; then, around the suns will appear planets, following in their course the simple or multiple heavenly body which holds them in its sphere of attraction.

Thus, from the amorphous nebula to the well-defined planetary systems, a tendency manifests itself with inviolate exactness, continuity, and positiveness. An unbroken solidarity unites the suns; an unbroken conglomeration unites these suns with the spires which hold them; unbroken is the connection between each spire and the other spires of the particular universe of which they are, as it were, the members and organs. Little by little the initial urge expresses itself in more and more determinated and delimited creations. "Nature" is satisfied only when the planetary individualities have emerged from their primitive confusion.

Let us now pass to the kingdom of life. Here we are faced with a theory that is very fashionable these days and considered as finally established by some of its adherents, namely, the transformation or evolution of vegetable and animal species. This theory we merely mention. Whether true or not, it is a provisional hypothesis that is not in opposition to the law which we are studying; if true, it simply confirms that law and throws it into relief; if false, it does not modify the general physiognomy of the phenomena.

In dealing with a single organism or with a chain of organisms, "Nature" everywhere and always strives to get away from indetermination in order to reach a differentiated individuality.

An organism is composed of cells. In the beginning all cells are alike. Animal or vegetable, they possess a nucleus, a protoplasm, a membrane. Each of these microscopic entities potentially contains all vital functions: nutritive, circulatory, reproductive; but they are not as yet differentiated from one another. Meanwhile the life principle is at work. Three of these cells associate themselves, divide the labor, and—if vegetable—tend in different directions. One supplies the calyptra for the root; another, the vessels destined to convey the sap; another, the tissue of the rind. And, strangely, the cells, as the only fabric of these organs in course of specialization, readily lend themselves to their new destinations, train themselves, modify themselves, so as to form wondrously fashioned grooves, leaves, flowers with stamens and pistils. The whole plant consists of cells, yet an intimate, irresistible force has compelled the numberless army of these tiny servants to subordinate their apparently uniform structure to the upbuilding of an infinitely complex one. And what results from all this labor, as fantastic in its way as the travail of the gigantic nebulæ developing into suns? A living being, that is, an organic whole, in which the functions are differentiated to a nicety, each playing its own autonomous part, at least in this sense that it has and holds attributes irreducible to those of its fellow functions.

If we consider animal and vegetable evolution in its *ensemble*, the same law is verified, on an immeasurably larger scale.

Undoubtedly, neither geology nor paleontology has spoken its last word on the subject. Nevertheless, the evidence supplied by these sciences is sufficient to let us see the general order according to which the different species have made their appearance on the surface of the earth.

Vegetable life did not start with the complex species which we admire to-day in our forests or cultivate in our gardens. It began with fungi or ferns whose colossal stature does not hide the extreme simplicity of their organism. And without claiming to be absolutely accurate, one can say that the usual classification adopted by botanists, and which proceeds from the thallophyta to the angiosperma, represents in a static state the chronological and dynamic order of evolution in the vegetable kingdom. There has been a progressive development from the simple to the complex, from a poorer to a richer individuality, from indetermination to differentiation. The primordial fungus had no root, stem, or leaves. The last link of the series possesses all these organs and many others. In it life has realized its fulness. It is complete, finished, perfect, considering the family to which it belongs.

The first stages of animal life offer an identical picture. Look in our museums at one of those enormous skeletons which you would think was the framework of an apocalyptic beast. What was this mysterious monster? A fish, a reptile, or a bird? It had something in common with all of them. You will say that the existing confusion enabled it to participate in the advantages of all three classes of living beings. No. The bird is too heavy to fly; its fins hinder it in the water; only with difficulty can it move on the earth. No wonder it had to disappear as a victim of its diverse aptitudes. But little by little the lines of demarcation between the groups of species become more distinct, and in every line complete individualities start into existence—so complete and well equipped that, under the influence and with the aid of secondary modifications, their offspring have survived down to our time. Here again "Nature" has worked for the benefit of individuality, since in strengthening and developing the frame of specific organisms it has made possible an infinite number of living individuals.

We have now to explore the world of human beings.

How are we to deal with this kingdom, which is our own? Shall we speak of the evolution of the species? In its essential structure the human species —I employ the word in its philosophical meaning—has not experienced evolution. The Cromagnon, the Heidelberg, the Neanderthal skulls are the skulls of men, physically and intellectually full-fledged members of the human race. And there would be small gain for us in registering the differences of their cephalic indices, the proportions of their limbs, the position of their spines, etc. Not as if these details were negligible. But such modifications do not affect the nature of man as man. Even if the animal descent of our species as to the body could be established, the law which we are trying to verify would not be disproved, for, after all, in the very order of consecutive determinations and perfections, man appears as a rather singular being, and as the crowning triumph of that law. Nowhere has life found a more delicate and complete organism to expand itself in than the human body.

Be that as it may, it is not the problem at issue. Let us take man at the epoch when he is concededly a true *homo sapiens*, when he lives in the society of his fellows—and what do we see?

In the midst of primitive societies, the individual is nothing or almost nothing. But let me not be misunderstood. It would be ridiculous to suppose that, even in these inferior groups, individuality was totally absent. Very likely here, as in more highly developed societies, the mass is subject to the influence of individuals who are more powerful and refined than the rest. None the less it cannot be denied that on a relatively low level of culture, the individual generally has no life or activity clearly distinct from that of his clan, tribe, or people. He does not think for himself, but passively conforms to social rites. He is, proportionately speaking, what the cell is to the organism of which it forms an integral part. It is only in later stages, when civilization has had a real start, that there emerge from the anonymous mass fully-formed characters, able to react against routine, to convey fresh thoughts, to acquire a certain autonomy. This emancipation may, at times, be dangerous to the social organism, and, at times, useful. When Christ came on earth, He staunchly defended the individual against the oppression of iniquitous tyrants. The tyranny exercised by Dives over Lazarus, the compulsion exerted by false doctors over the conscience of the poor, the despotism which made women slaves and children victims, were abuses which custom and law had unjustly sanctioned.

If we examine the problem from another aspect, does it not seem that the triumph of true personality is the goal of every man worthy of the name of man?

For what is man? A rational being, able to know truth and duty, and to conform his acts to the dictates of his conscience. From such self-mastery, society, if built on a right basis, has nothing to fear. Ideal would be the society where each member would spontaneously fulfil his task, obey the authorities as guardians of the common good, not as a matter of mere routine, not for dread of the police, but because conscience demands obedience and fidelity to duty. Education has no other aim than to form such a directing conscience in every human being—a conscience at the same time submissive and autonomous, which will make of men not blind machines or weather-cocks influenced by the whim of the winds, but men of strong will-power, making their own resolutions, avoiding the confusion and chaos of flitting impressions, passionate impulses, and enslaving ignorance.

We have explored the heavens and the earth, the vegetable and animal kingdoms, and human life. Everywhere we have seen the same inflexible law manifesting itself. To claim that "Nature" ignores the individual is to deny the scientifically ascertained tendencies of "Nature."

Far from being a despotic and barbaric mother who takes pleasure in savagely breaking the instruments which she uses, and sacrificing them to her ferocious egotism, "Nature" never neglects the individual. Her intention, as manifested by the progress and character of all beings, and by all other phenomena accessible to our knowledge, is rather to apply her efforts to the production of beings more sharply differentiated from one another, of organisms more and more complex, and thereby to exercise an activity that is constantly richer and more perfect. This tendency is vaguely seen in the slow and prodigious transformation of the universe; it is more clearly apparent in the rhythm which presides over the successive apparition of vegetable and animal species, and it is most splendidly manifested in man, the last visible object of Nature's solicitude and inexhaustible energy.

3

I foresee the objection which you will oppose to the conclusions of this rapid survey of the Universe. Even if the law is as stated, it brings us no farther. True, Nature provides for individuality, but the individuals disappear and cannot escape final annihilation. The stern fact of universal destruction stands out with mournful monotony. The solution of the problem of survival after death has not advanced one step.

Is this your thought? Indeed, at the point at which we have arrived, we must be very prudent. We cannot proceed with the same assurance. In fact we can scarcely hazard a conjecture or a hypothesis. But if the conjecture has a sound basis in fact, and if the hypothesis is reasonable, they deserve our attention, and surely will not lead us away from the truth. Let us, then, pursue our subject courageously.

Mathematicians are a happy lot, for they are endowed with the gift of prophecy. Put down a few points on paper, and, presto, with the aid of mysterious equations, they will tell you: this curved line will pass these points; infallibly it will end here, not there.

Mathematicians are not the only ones to enjoy this privilege. Knowing the propulsive force of an explosive, an engineer will tell you: a projectile of such and such weight, thrown forward at such and such initial speed, will infallibly fall to the ground at such and such a distance. And the wonder is—unless the pointer has made a mistake in his calculation—that it will really fall there.

In a more general manner it may be said that when the direction and force of a movement are known, one can theoretically foresee the goal which this movement will reach. I say, theoretically, for, in matter of fact, one has always to reckon with that inconvenience inseparable from every concrete realization—contingency. The mathematician with his curved line is not subject to this inconvenience, for he argues in the abstract; and yet the infallibility of his previsions does not extend beyond the horizon of the ideal. Aside from such a case, his "prophecy," even if it is most rigorously scientific, remains merely probable.

However, the chances of error diminish in proportion as the foreseen phenomenon embraces a greater number of future realizations. I cannot affirm that "this oak will yield acorns" with the same assurance with which I can assert that "oaks will yield acorns." The intensity of the movement adds a guarantee of security to a prevision. The trajectory of a heavy projectile, launched at great initial speed, is less subject to deviations than a balloon inflated with hydrogen and feebly thrown forth by the hand of a child. And if at last weight and intensity combine, prevision, without ceasing to be exposed to the surprises of contingency, acquires a maximum of probability.

Now let us return to our inquiry. In spite of the pessimists who accuse Nature of despising individuality, we have seen that, on the contrary, the Universe actually favors it. This tendency is as ample as we can wish it to be, since it embraces all beings subject to our investigation. Its intensity is not doubtful, for we see it at work without interruption as far back as we can go.

How far can the trajectory continue its march? How far can this craving for individuality be carried? We cannot answer this question with absolute certainty, because contingency is involved, and because for us who look upon Nature as the work of an Infinite Intellect distinct from the world, contingency also represents the liberty of the divine initiatives.

Nevertheless, if we consider the face of the world that confronts us, a very natural hypothesis presents itself. The constitution of individualities already determined, enriched, and perfected, seems to lack at least one trait. Every being desires to live and dreads annihilation. Would not "Nature" accomplish a new and decisive step forward if she gave birth to an individual that could escape ruin and destruction, and possess permanency and identity of duration, not by privilege, but by right?

We readily acknowledge that, for reasons still to be investigated, such a being, individualized to this supreme degree, does not appear at once in the series of organisms in course of formation. Also, in noticing it quite often, we misunderstand the profound intention which presides over the succession of beings and proclaims the law of the universal and inevitable transitoriness of all things.

Now that our judgment is straightened, does it not seem extraordinary, nay, in a way impossible, that the trajectory does not reach the end to which it normally tends?

But since "Nature" produces organisms which gradually ascend and superimpose themselves upon a less or a more perfect order, can we not find at the summit of being a being built strongly enough to resist the wear and tear of ages, and adding to its perfections that of never returning into the primordial and indeterminate chaos?

How shall such progress be accomplished?—by way of evolution, or of spontaneous generation, or of creation? This question does not concern us now. We see a movement rising and tending in a certain direction; then, completing, by simple prevision, this movement begun with wondrous energy, we conclude: the apparition of a stable and immortal individuality does not contradict the order of nature. Such an individuality would not be out of place in the Universe, but, on the contrary, would consecrate, as it were, the gigantic effort of which the Universe is the incontestable witness.

An audacious, but frail hypothesis, you will reply; a hypothesis which bristles with insuperable difficulties.

Do you accept the viewpoint of those modern philosophers who see in the Universe a self-sufficient whole which excludes the intervention of a creative Cause distinct from it? How do you know that the generative power of a cosmos thus defined is not limited, and does not manifest its limitation precisely by the fact that it is constantly defeated in producing immortal beings? You admit that Nature is solicitous with regard to individuals; but if after thousands, or perhaps millions and billions of years, it has not yet succeeded in reaching the point at which you would like to see it, is this not a crushing proof of incurable weakness?

Or do you hold with the philosophers who accept the principle of "becoming," that is, of an eternal transition of things from state to state, an endless flux of phenomena? To place a being into such a fantastic whirlpool is an impossibility and a contradiction.

Or are you a theist who believes in a personal and provident God? If so, what right have you to scrutinize His counsels and to assign an arbitrary limit to His activity? God does what He wills, and there is no "trajectory" that He cannot interrupt or break, if so it pleases Him.

Thus the objections continue to pour down on us. To enable us to face the storm, it is enough to state how we regard the hypothesis just proposed. Though insufficient in itself, it may become useful if it places us on solid ground.

That solid ground is the ground of reality. Before discussing the problem of life after death from a materialistic, evolutionist or theistic standpoint, let us study the facts.

So far, the facts have compelled us to react against a too pessimistic interpretation of the Universe. They have suggested a conjecture which we have accepted as such, but not as an ascertained truth. Can not these same facts render us a further service by showing us that the conjecture, for which they are to some extent responsible, acquires, thanks to them, at least a beginning of verification?

4

As the world unrolls the splendid series of its harmonious creations, lo, the intellect finally arises in that series of beings and phenomena.

What is the true nature of the intellect? We shall learn later on from what cause, in the last analysis, the intellect springs. Let us be satisfied for the present to assert its existence, and to acquire those indispensable notions about its activity which flow from an elementary study of the phenomena that centre around it.

The intellect first appears to us not as a diffuse, vague, and impersonal power, but as a well-defined and positive attribute of a definite and easily recognizable individual, namely, man.

We speak of intelligence in general and abstract terms, as though it revealed itself to our eyes in this form. But as soon as we leave the region of the abstract, the intellect again becomes what in fact it is, namely, the special property of a certain number of concrete beings called men. It therefore rightly belongs to the series of those determinations by which "Nature" reveals her orientation, or, to use again the terms of our comparison—by which "Nature" draws her trajectory.

This first conclusion is not superfluous, as it dispenses us from the obligation of dealing with those nebulous theorists who see in the human intellect a sort of impersonal soul immanent in the Universe.

But what new element does it bring to the world? The history of the human mind will tell us.

As soon as it is created, the intellect—not unlike a mirror or a mysterious reflector—turns towards the Universe and strives to measure it, to penetrate it, to comprehend it. It is a prodigious undertaking that cannot be accomplished at the first attempt. Thousands of times the intellect has to turn back and recommence in order to solve the puzzle.

Behold it in its first debut (rather relative in itself) when there is no way of observing it at work. It bends itself to the arid labor of speculation; it attempts to construct syntheses, which often are crude, always inaccurate and tainted with error, but which betray an ambition to embrace the *ensemble* of things at one glance. Its efforts seem to be victorious; the mind becomes more confident—so confident of itself that it stops, strays, and falls! But this excessive pride and the fatuous ignorance resulting therefrom, again prove that the intellect is conscious of its innate and inevitable mission to search for the truth and that it is congenitally adapted to deal with the truth.

The recent progress of ethnography shows that man, even in lower forms of society, has classified and labelled the phenomena of nature and reduced them to a system, which has for him the same value that philosophy and theology have for us. Primitive man, whom we look upon with disdain from the heights of our sophisticated civilization, pretends to receive the Universe within the limits of his mind, or, to employ a rather bold metaphor, to hold the world in the hollow of his hand.

In course of time the old frames break, the early illusions disappear, the world grows larger, and man invents new formulas, again fancying that they explain the whole substance of the Cosmos. Such perseverance merits a reward. By and by intellectual giants arise, men like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who make a decisive step forward and rear a foundation on which other thinkers will patiently and surely build the edifice of Truth.

Here, then, we have the intellect with its deep-seated tendencies, as witnessed by the positive and unanimous testimony of mankind. Behold it with its ambitions and weaknesses, and above all with its proper and rigorously determined tendency. Its object is knowledge of the whole Universe—a knowledge not only of this object or that, not only the collection and registration of the phenomena of nature, but a synthetic knowledge aiming at unity, seeking to discover the reason for things—the immediate and the ultimate cause, the source from which they issue, the reason why they are and act as they do, and in such a way that in the measure of their evocation into existence, man's intellect may trace them to absolutely and eternally true principles.

You would think that the Universe, weary of its solitude, had wished to adopt an assistant or a companion, not as a forgetful, superficial witness, but as one mindful, reflective, conscious, able to understand its secrets.

Very well. But what are we to conclude from this? How does the birth of intelligent individuals mark the desired achievement of the trajectory described by "Nature"? In other words, how does the existence of rational beings give evidence in favor of Immortality?

You asked me a while ago from what philosophical angle I regarded the genesis and development of the Universe. Did I consider it as self-sufficient, excluding any cause external to it? Did I see it as subject to the law of evolution, rejecting both the idea of a transcendental cause and the notion of a being permanent amid the flux of phenomena? Or did I accept a Universe created by a First Cause, an intelligent and all-powerful Creator?

I answer that the third hypothesis alone can be accepted, because—I am here merely indicating the general outline of my argument—a movement that is neither perpetual nor transitory is inconceivable unless it is joined to an immovable just cause, and consequently, is situated outside that movement, and because a limited Universe demands the existence of a cause that is in itself illimitable and, therefore external to it. But I add—and it is the point I mean to emphasize here: whatever theory we may adopt, from the moment when an intelligent being exists positively and in concrete form in the Universe, there is a possibility that such a being may be endowed with Immortality.

The world is created by God. He is its first cause, the one necessary being, the infinite and eternal source of all existence. Now if the Universe is the domain of the intellect, the intellect must be destined to arrive at the knowledge of God, since without God the Universe would remain unintelligible. And how can God—I mean the God of Nature—become accessible to the intellect, if the intellect has not in some way a share in His nature? God is an incorporeal spirit. A spirit alone can understand a spirit; the incorporeal alone can know the corporeal. And if this is so, Immortality comes forth from the land of dreams and enters the sphere of reality. The final end towards which our intellectual nature tends, qualifies and determines this nature, and defines it as a function of the Eternal and the Absolute.

Against all evidence you adhere to the concept of a Universe obeying the law of godless evolution, and you glibly declare that to assume the presence of a permanent Being in an evolutionary Universe involves a contradiction. This conclusion seems to me to be tainted with an awkward apriorism that militates against facts. The mission of the intellect—as realized concretely in the individual—is to know the Universe. Have we not the right to conclude that it will last at least as long as the Universe itself? And if, with the radical evolutionists, you posit the thesis that the Universe is driven by an eternal movement, endless as to duration—a movement either progressive or regressive, or swaying between progress and regression—you must admit that the intellect, united with this movement, is eternal like it; it is its luminous, conscious reflex and its inseparable companion.

But, you say, neither the one nor the other of these positions satisfies me. You are a materialist and refuse to be compromised by accepting hypotheses that cannot be verified. Is the Universe finite or infinite, temporal or eternal? You waive the question and, to avoid controversy, admit for the sake of argument that the world is limited. From a limited world, you argue, a first cause is excluded, the existence of an imperishable being is inconceivable; the Universe disappears, and there is no God.

Even in that hypothesis a certain survival, if not immortality, would still be possible. For since, according to all appearances, the Universe is not yet near its end, and the intellect has not yet gained a complete knowledge of it, the intellect has the right to expect a long life in order to attain its aim.

But I will go farther. The disadvantage—or the advantage—of a concept of the Universe without a God to prevent the return of all things to nothingness, consists in this that it shows up the contradiction existing between the aptitudes of the material offered them to work upon. In such a hypothesis, indeed, it is not enough to say that the intellect is equal to the Universe, but in all truth it must be said that the intellect transcends the Universe.

It transcends it because the whole field of actual reality is contained in that infinitely vaster field of possible realities which only the intellect is able to conceive. The intellect, in other words, remains in the state of an unused power, and we are forced to the singular conclusion that the Universe has produced a being that is superior to itself, which is absurd.

Willy-nilly we must assign to the intellect a different origin and a larger aim. To separate it from the grasp of a finite, limited, and transitory Universe is nothing else but to reopen to it another way to Immortality.

To condemn the intellect to death, therefore, is not as easy as some people imagine. No matter whence it comes and what may be the structure of the Universe from which it has sprung, the intellect, from the moment of its birth, has an inalienable right to exist.

In it and through it, the intention which runs from stage to stage, from form to form, to individual perfection, seems to have found one of its most felicitous and decisive expressions, *i. e.*, permanency in being. And this permanency is demanded by the human intellect, not as a favor, but as part of its very nature. Thus the trajectory is completed, not in the realm of conjectures, subject to the surprises of contingency, but in the sphere of positive reality and actual experience.

There is nothing here to surprise us. Later on, when we have gathered other shafts of light apt to illumine the question whether our soul survives the body, we shall see that, after all, there exists but one convincing proof, to which all other proofs are supplementary, namely, the argument from the nature of the intellect, its aptitudes and acts.

Is it not impressive that, at the very first glance at the Universe, this mysterious power forces itself upon our attention and installs itself, as it were, at the centre of the problem of Immortality?

Of course this first argument does not solve the problem definitively. Several aspects of it remain obscure. But did I not tell you at the outset that we must proceed slowly and patiently, careful not to go beyond the proofs supplied by the successive points of view from which we regard the problem?

If by the application of this method we had only succeeded in narrowing the blockade around the final proof, its use would be justified. But we have done more than that: we have gained a series of arguments each of which has an intrinsic value of its own, even though it be but relative.

From now on our prospects brighten. The endless duration of *something* within us—something which belongs to our essential nature as human beings, is not only a possibility, but likewise a probability. The voice of the Universe tells us so, and that majestic voice echoes the thought of the Creator Himself.

II

THE TESTIMONY OF RELIGIONS

The destiny of man is roughly outlined in the history of the Universe. "Nature," or rather the Author of nature, through His manifold creations seems to prepare the arrival of a being who, by virtue of his intellect, is not only equal to, but greater than, the Universe.

But the intellect is not something that is to be; it is something that *is.* It exists within us now. It is a part of our nature. We possess it as an inalienable property. This shows that our craving for immortality has a certain degree of consistency from the very start.

But while the testimony is admissible, it remains in the state of an unpainted canvas or an unfinished sketch. However, the difficulties which it involves should not stop us in our march. We shall acquire the missing elements as we proceed.

Turning away from the splendors of the starry welkin and from the lofty visions of the Universe, we return to our earthly abode, and to the little ship which for the moment carries us through the depths of immensity.

Our mind and heart are somewhat more at ease. No longer do we say with Pascal: "The eternal silence of those infinite spaces frightens me." No. We have heard the vague and distant whispers of a hymn on Immortality. Our earth is very small; we, too, are but pygmies. But what does it matter, since our good ship shelters *something* which possesses the mysterious power to be equal to the infinite?

Whither shall we go now? Necessarily we must turn back to humanity. Is not man the possessor of that intellect in which we have begun to decipher the great, the portentous promise of a life after death?

But how shall we undertake the study of mankind? How many centuries, think you, would it require to comprehend the works of nature, animate and inanimate? You do not know. But you can see, at least in part, that humanity itself is a wonderfully vast world, so vast that it can never be adequately explored by scientists, no matter how resourceful, nor by psychologists, no matter how keen, nor by historians, no matter how patient, nor by poets, no matter how tender. It is a wonderful world, a terrible world, resembling a keyboard apparently uniform, but none the less able to express all discords and all harmonies. Above all, it is an unavoidable world, for we are a part of it.

I shall not sin against methodology if I now proceed to discuss a trait which is one of the essential characteristics of humanity, namely, religion. I ask: Is it correct (and if so, to what extent) to assert that religion can render a testimony worthy of credence to the idea of Immortality?

I

Before entering upon this problem I fain would solve a question of competence.

Can a Catholic deal with such studies as this with a free mind? Is there not danger that he will more or less consciously introduce into the course of his investigation some dogmatic prepossessions or ready-made ideas which are apt to vitiate his conclusions? Deep down in his conscience he knows what he has to believe and will naturally conduct his inquiry in such a way that the history of religions must confirm his belief. "We know full well whither you are marching," our opponents declare. "We shall be made to assist in the triumphal pageant of ancient religions and be told that the faith of mankind in the immortality of the soul has never failed since the dawn of history, but has shown a marvelous unanimity which proves your own belief. The procedure is well-known and ancient: it dates from the time of the first Christian apologists."

I reply that if the facts of history would constrain me to give to my demonstration such a simple and optimistic turn, I would surely not invent a falsehood to disarm the suspicions of my opponents. I should say: "Here are the facts. If you will not believe me, build your own structure."

But if, on the contrary, I should say that the testimony of history is not so formal and trenchant, would I be believed? Yes, for my fairness would then be manifest. Now such is the case.

At the risk of upsetting the fond prejudices which freethinkers may harbor against Catholicism, I say without circumlocution: The history of religions, taken as a whole (apart, of course, from Christianity), does not supply to the dogma of Immortality a sufficiently categorical argument for the needs of my cause. I straightway pass to examples.

There is Egypt, for instance. That country is a vast necropolis from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the confines of Nubia, traversed and impregnated as it were by the sacred waters of the Nile. Gigantic pyramids, oblong mastabas, underground galleries, stone sarcophagi—what a sublime evocation of the world beyond! Let us approach a little closer. This massive architecture is fantastically and profusely decorated with paintings, sculptures, hieroglyphic inscriptions, all of them verging towards this one idea, that there is a life beyond the grave, that the dead are happy after their earthly existence.

No nation has ever pondered so deeply over what follows death. None has ever embodied its ideas of the after-life in such artistic and striking forms.

What is the secret thought inspiring this display of mortuary luxury, which ranges from most refined delicacy to Cyclopic and gigantic enormity? Alas, merely a chilly dread and a desolating conception. The Egyptian fancies (since when, we do not know, for the idea is lost in the night of prehistory) that the destiny of the dead depends on the conservation of their earthly bodies and on the faithful remembrance of the living. If the body of the departed is left to perish, if his parents, friends, and descendants neglect their duty towards him, then death once more overtakes the unfortunate man, who this time disappears for ever. Know you now why the inhabitants of the Nile Valley heap up enormous blocks of stone?—why they enclose corpses in a coffin of granite?—why they strive to hide the dead from the indiscreet and greedy curiosity of grave-violators? What else could they do? If the corpses were destroyed, the dead would no longer live.

It was a glad day when the divine Anubis taught them how to embalm the dead. Wrappings and perfumes secure to the dead the conservation of his earthly form: his life beyond the grave will be all the more vigorous and enduring.

You have perhaps admired the strange frescoes, seemingly painted yesteryear, which adorn the walls of the sepulchral chambers of the Egyptians. You have perhaps seen images of the dead engraved or carved in porphyry, alabaster, or basalt. Here are reproduced the scenes of the dead man's private and public life. He drinks, he eats, he visits his property, he examines his granaries, he writes, he fishes, he enjoys himself with his family. Do these works of art represent mere imaginings, inspired by love for those who are gone? No, there is no such thing in Egypt as art for art's sake. Most of these statues, frescoes, and engravings are buried in tombs and never see the light of day.

Why are they thus hidden away in darkness? Why were they fashioned at all? They are the material support of the dead man's life in the world beyond. These statues, these figurines of hard stone, multiply his chances of escaping annihilation. These vivid paintings, the joy of archeologists and historians, possess the magic power to transform themselves beyond the grave into living, active realities. Through them the men and women buried there can continue to eat, drink, and enjoy themselves, and preserve their social rank. Through them, also, the living, in dealing with the dead, can defend themselves against their own failures. They will die in their turn. Their descendants will perhaps forget them, or have to disappear. But the tomb will be there to receive them. Thanks to its solidity and magic power, it is a self-sufficient source and means of survival.

But, I ask, what is this singular Immortality which is bound up with a heap of stones, with the brush of an artist or the chisel of a sculptor? Is not the use of the term Immortality in this connection a play upon words? The Egyptian astonishes us with his haunting thoughts of the hereafter and still more with the timidity and materialism of his notions of the world beyond.

From Egypt let us pass to Central America. An ancient and rather advanced civilization graced those lands: the Mexican, for instance, whose radiance shone over a large part of South America.

The ancient Mexicans had several ways of disposing of the bodies of their dead. Assuming that some of them really fulfilled the conditions of an indefinite survival after death, there is one at least which does not, and apparently it is the one most widely employed, since it applies to all those who die a natural death. The Mitclan—such is its name—is reached only after a long pilgrimage, which ends in a catastrophe. A tiger leaps on the traveler and devours his heart; the dead man then falls into the black waters of a river where the Xochitonal lizard has its hiding place. The symbolism is clear. The lizard signifies the earth and at the same time stands for the last day of the year. After having undergone the trials of existence, man finally loses his life and is transformed into clay; which means that he has no immortal soul and death is for him the end of everything.

If we cross the Pacific, we find ourselves in China, that privileged country where ancestor-worship is so widely practiced. Does this worship imply faith in

Immortality? Nothing is less certain, if we may judge from its ritual. In every home in China a little shrine is set aside to honor the memory of the dead. The material sign of such commemoration is a tablet. Was this tablet once upon a time the real abode of the dead, or is it a simplified sign of a larger and more complex tomb? Though they are important, I cannot enter into details because they have nothing to do with our present inquiry. Instead our attention is attracted by a curious and suggestive custom. Perhaps you think that these tablets are allowed to accumulate from year to year, and remain exposed indefinitely for the veneration of the living? However, this is not the case. After five generations, the oldest tablets are withdrawn and no longer occupy a place of honor. It is assumed that after five generations the ancestor has run the full cycle of his personal existence in the hereafter. He has been reabsorbed into the nameless whole and is therefore no longer entitled to individual worship.

In India, the land of daring and subtle philosophic speculations, does human thought reveal itself in a loftier manner and less tied to the clay of the earth? Yes and no, for it swings back and forth. Examine the religious doctrine of India at any period of its development, and you will invariably be disappointed.

The ancient Vedanta, for instance, in its primitive and rough condition, reëchoes the Egyptian idea that the dead are at the mercy of the living. Every year the dead man reascends from his subterranean habitat, through holes dug into the ground, to the level of the soil and demands food from the members of his family or his clan. It is given him through the gaping holes and the *Prêta*, being fed and satisfied, returns to his home in the nether world. If he does not get the indispensable food, he becomes angry and rages; such an enraged ghost is apt to commit terrible crimes, like a starving man who falls into a dangerous fit of insanity before he renders up his soul.

On this naturalistic basis rest both of the two great doctrinal systems of the Hindus—Brahmanism and Buddhism. In the former religion, the supreme destiny of man is the return of the individual soul (after a series of existences and reincarnations) to the transcendental, universal essence, an unnamed One, the Great All. And the question whether the soul survives bodily death cannot even arise, because the "ego" ends by becoming reintegrated into the vaster reality with which it is identified.

Buddhism is even more radical if possible, as it assumes a flow of phenomena, amid which personality is dissolved, becomes a stranger to itself, passes from existence into existence, from sorrow to sorrow, until the day arrives when the inconsistent and fugacious "ego" disappears entirely into the abyss of Nirvana, and the craving for life becomes extinct.

We have gone around the world. Of course, we have not explored all existing theories. But we may safely assert that the peoples whose beliefs we have examined are not by any means an insignificant fraction of humanity. They occupy a considerable geographic area, and their place is in the first rank of ancient civilizations. Around these important focuses could be grouped others, imbued with more or less similar ideas, and it would not be far from the truth if we summed up the conclusions of our study in this proposition: Humanity, whenever it has not fallen into a Pantheism that denies personal Immortality, has unanimously believed that the soul survives the body, but has not decided the essential question whether such survival is unconditional and unlimited, in a word, whether it can be clearly interpreted as Immortality.

2

Is not this admission opposed to the thesis we are trying to establish? What can be the value of a testimony which is so ambiguous and obscure?

Concretely, a straight line is not always the shortest distance between two points. Eager searchers for truth have often found this out at their expense. If you deny this lesson of experience, you run the risk of encountering grave obstacles and of being pinned to the spot.

More haste, less speed, is prudent advice. A detour will take more time, but it will enable us to resume the question at its source.

Religion could not exist if there were not in man what is called religious sentiment, religious need. In what consists this sentiment, this need, which is so imperious that for thousands of years it well nigh occupied the general history of civilization?

I am not going to review all the definitions framed in the course of ages or even in our time. It would be an endless task, and the display of high-sounding formulas, some of them extremely complex, would merely confuse us. Nay, it might even hurt us. Then, incongruous multiplicity of colors and their wearying uncertainty might prevent us from perceiving the luminous and simple evidence.

Among all the various definitions drawn from history, psychology, sociology, and other branches of knowledge, there is not one, so far as I know, which does not contain this fundamental and universal statement that the religious sentiment, in itself and in the institutions which embody it, in the rites and ceremonies which express it, and in the sacred objects which it employs, always implies a relation to the hereafter.

What does this vague and evasive word mean? It means a world distinct from and superior to ours, peopled by beings of a higher type than man, beings who dominate him and demand of him the fulfillment of certain duties, a certain conduct of life. The religious feeling, in its directive lines, is at least this. I say, at least this, for it is also something else. But it is at least this, first and above all because it leads us to believe in what religion calls *the divine:* gods, or a God. The divinity belongs to a world which can compenetrate our own, but is on another plane. It may be conceived as a personal or impersonal entity. The monotheistic religions adopt the former, the pantheistic creeds the latter, notion. But, whether personal or not, the divinity belongs to another universe, a universe which is incorruptible, where no catastrophes occur, and where there is no to-morrow.

Even the gods of Greece, otherwise so strangely human, are immortal. The mystery of the passion of Osiris, in Egypt, is enacted every day, in the secret penetralia of temples; the god, though seemingly dead, always rises again. And one may conjecture that the mortuary rites performed for him are only designed to enhance, by a splendid contrast, his never-failing vigor. Among the peoples of inferior culture, where the divine is even more deeply immerged in matter, where every thing is god—the trees, the springs, the rivers, the harvests—the animating spirit (which is in reality the only truly divine element) of these material objects is immune against corruption and annihilation and mostly always conceived as indestructible.

And thus, independently of any selfish regard for itself and its own destiny, humanity, guided by its own religious instinct, admits the existence of another world, the world of the divine, where the law of death does not apply.

The same instinct leads man to another certitude. But this time there is question no longer of transcendental entities distinct from himself; but directly of his own future, and of his personal fate.

There is not one religion which does not preoccupy itself constantly and habitually with life after death. Not one solves the problem radically and absolutely by a negation. All settle it, totally or partly, in a positive sense. Human existence is not bounded within the narrow limits of the period that spans from the cradle to the grave. It transcends these limits, now on this side and now on that. On this side, as we see in the religions which demand faith in successive existences, each of which longer or shorter on a supramundane plane; on that side, as we see in mostly all historical religions. So much so that, to sum up, we may say that the religious sentiment is correlated to two concepts of the hereafter: that of mortal men and that of immortal gods.

These are the experimental data. Do they help us to solve our problem?

Apparently not. There is nothing to prove that these two concepts ever coalesce. If they did, the solution would be easy.

Suppose that the hereafter of the immortal gods were at the same time the hereafter of mortal men.

Suppose even more categorically that man believed himself a sharer of the nature of the gods: then this faith in his own immortality, even if it had not been explicitly formulated in the course of ages, would stand on its own feet, so to speak, and the psychologist and the philosopher would find no difficulty in explaining its cause.

But such identification cannot be easily established. The result of our initial researches cannot be eliminated by a stroke of the pen. The belief in a life after death, which is proclaimed by all religions, is not the same as belief in immortality. The two hereafters are, it seems, separated by an impassable gulf.

Will this judgment stand the test?

I know there would be an excellent way to modify it, namely, by admitting the theory adopted and developed by a number of anthropologists under the guidance of Tylor and Spencer. According to them, all religion, including the belief in gods, proceeds, by a series of successive steps, from the cult of the dead. The gods, even the God of the monotheistic religions, are the discarnate avatars of human doubles.

A similar theory has been evolved by Durkheim; with this difference, however, that the souls of men, the spirits, and the gods, before mutually exchanging identities, were part of a collective over-soul, that social soul which is the starting-point of all higher evolution.

If things had really happened thus, the task of connecting the two hereafters would be easy enough. The privilege of endless duration would belong to the whole series of avatars. From bottom to top, from the unembodied spirits to the highest gods, the pyramid would be sealed with the cement of immortality.

The most attractive theories are not necessarily the truest. Those I have just mentioned have been demolished. Their foundation was unsafe. From our point of view they seem altogether too simple, for they do not explain why the gulf between mortals and immortals remains open.

Why, indeed, should we stubbornly try to build upon the sand of unstable hypotheses, when History itself offers to supply us with direct data for an acceptable solution?

What is it exactly that we want to know? We want to know whether the two concepts of the hereafter ever remain foreign to each other, or whether, on the contrary, they unite and become identified in such a way that a condition analogous to immortality becomes the property both of gods and men. That, in my opinion, is the crux of the problem.

Before attempting to solve it, let me make two remarks. First, it behooves us to avoid that faulty method which explores the history of religions as if all the events which it relates were on the same linear perspective. Science rightly reacts more and more against this manner of pen-picturing history, which reminds one altogether too much of the naïve manner of primitive painters.

We must take into account the differences of time, of mentality, of environment; the changes in viewpoints, the changes of ideas which, if left unheeded, would lead us into grave error. The history of ancient religions—like that of civilization in general—is subject to the law of progress. Progress may be slower here than elsewhere. It is more difficult to discern in the domain of religion because, in most cases, new beliefs take their place beside, or are superposed upon, the old without destroying the latter, and this in a manner which may appear contradictory to those who judge strictly according to the rules of logic. Progress exists none the less. Little by little the sediments accumulate and form a variegated humus, out of which grows the faith of ancestral peoples.

In the second place, the very idea of progress is inseparable from that of tendency in the psychological and moral domain. It is possible that a current of ideas starts and develops without having the time or the strength or the means to reach its goal. To conclude from its abortion that it never existed is an error as well as an injustice. Success is the legitimate crowning of an effort. Even a complete failure—and *a fortiori* a partial one—does not mean that there has been no effort worthy of consideration.

If, for instance, the Scholastic movement had not led to the great theological synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, would it deserve to be treated as negligible? And if modern Science had not advanced beyond Newton, Lavoisier or Cuvier, would it be permissible to ignore these great pioneers? The study of the various schools of human thought, whether they were successful or not, is as necessary and as interesting as those of martial victories; for these attempts, trials, and intuitions reveal the beauty and nobility of man striving to go beyond himself by incessant forward steps.

Humanity, from a religious point of view, does not present itself to the eye as a motionless and life-less block in bygone ages. Mankind has ever moved forward and modified its beliefs. The idea of survival after death originated at a very early date.

We are told that a chasm divides the world of the immortal gods from the world of dead men who survive in the great beyond. But this view is not quite in keeping with the data of history. If a chasm exists, there is also an incipient movement or tendency which aims to fill it, that is to say, to connect the survival of men with the immortality of the gods. And even if this tendency remained only a tendency, never reaching its aim, it would still prove that humanity of old not only did not deny the idea of an endless survival, but with an *élan* which moves us and gives us matter for reflection, undertook to conquer immortality.

I cannot set forth all the facts which justify this conclusion; but here are a few of the most significant of them. The civilization of the ancient Egyptians was at one time believed to have been almost immobile. This was an error of which recent discoveries have disabused us. Egypt was not withdrawn from the law of progress; its concept of the hereafter, in particular, underwent many changes in the course of centuries. At first the dead were supposed to reside in their tombs and to lead a solitary life resembling that of earth, though less happy because deprived of comfort. In course of time, thanks to the magical operations of which we spoke above, the small abode became larger. To the living, who see it from the outside, the tomb is a work of art more or less strange, more or less cleverly executed. To the dead it is a miniature world, where they miss nothing of what made them happy while among the living. They have wealth, luxury, slaves, women. But there is no indication of the presence of a god communicating inexhaustible strength to the soul in her palatial prison.

The scene changes and the curtain is raised to show another picture. Does the dead man still reside in his tomb? Yes, undoubtedly. For, in Egypt less than elsewhere, a deposit of ancient beliefs is never destroyed by a later deposit. The dead man remains in his tomb, yet not completely so. In a certain sense he is no longer there.

Whither has he gone? The sacred papyri buried with the mummy tell us. The dead man, at the moment when he drew his last breath, started on a perilous journey. He traveled across mysterious countries. Guided by precious scrolls, he avoided many dangers. He has at last arrived, not at his final goal, but at a decisive halt. Osiris, the god of the dead, waits for him on his tribunal, draped in a white shroud, surrounded by stern assessors. The traveler appears before him, tells the story of his life, proclaims his innocence, his purity. He is weighed in the scales of justice. Now all is settled. The judgment is pronounced. The man who came from the world of the living is called to enjoy the happiness of the elect in the fields of Ialoo, a delightful country, where he will meet his fellowmen who have preceded him. But a still greater and better gift awaits him: Osiris, the god who seems to die merely to re-arise triumphantly, will be king and master. The kingdom of the dead is also the kingdom of an immortal divinity.

Another step, and the scene again changes: this time it takes on the splendor of an apotheosis. Osiris has not disappeared; his tribunal and his severe justice are still in evidence. But the fields of Ialoo fade away into a gray horizon. On the first plane above, a luminous bark leisurely proceeds on the waters of a heavenly Nile, which flows in a bed dug even with the cornice of the Universe. It is the bark of the Sun, the dazzling god who, like Osiris, nightly escapes the cold clasp of death and in the morning reappears in the East and gloriously ascends anew the heights of heaven.

At the rocky pass of Abydos a crowd of disembodied souls awaits him. They have been brought up on the funereal barks that glide amid the singing of hymns and the dirges of mourners on the waters of the terrestrial Nile. Suddenly the sun appears, advances, grows, glitters; and as he passes, the souls spring forth, lightsome and radiant, and the voyage begun on earth is continued in heaven, in the intimate companionship of an immortal god.

Such, briefly, is the Egyptian scheme of the hereafter. When did these diverse concepts appear? Did they originate simultaneously or successively? How did they meet? How were they combined? That is not part of our study. All we care to know is the direction of their progress. And on this essential point there is no doubt.

The Egyptian, that extraordinary man absorbed by the thought of death, and the life beyond, never wearies of exploring the problem of his destiny. A marvelous instinct tells him that it is not sufficient to assure his corpse against the chances of corruption and to safeguard the place where this corpse reposes. While ever attached to this primitive idea, he yet extends his arms toward the heights where the divinity resides, and in his wild race stops only when his soul, his "double," his spirit, at last falls into the arms of an immortal god.

This is not yet a positive and explicit faith in Immortality, but it is at least a desire, an intuition, a call and a craving stronger than the deficiencies and failures of rational argumentation.

In studying the Hindus, too, we must beware of superficial interpretations and false solutions. True, the fate of the Vedic "prêta" is not to be envied. But the "prêta" rebels against it. The picture of the survival of those miserable larvæ which seem to crawl upon the earth, enfeebled or ready to be changed into wild beasts, is followed by a more consoling vision. The dead gather in a field of happiness, presided over by a certain Yama, who, perhaps, is a deified mortal or humanized god. But in India as in Egypt man at last meets a god. The upward movement is brief, because Hindu thought evolves quite rapidly from Vedic naturalism to Brahmanic intellectualism. We swim, as it were, in the heavy waters of Pantheism and seem to have lost all traces of the problem of personal immortality. The meeting of mortal man with the divinity might end in a catastrophe by the divine element absorbing into its impassible and monstrous bosom the soul with all her aspirations of personal immortality.

If we had a Hindu mentality, we should perhaps be led to modify our impression. To the Brahman the human soul is identical with the divinity and matter is but a veil which hides this identity. The veil falls, and what do we see? The universal "self," which slumbered deep down within our souls, has been completely absorbed by the Infinite and the Eternal.

You may deny this theory, for it bristles with insurmountable difficulties. But from the point of view which we have adopted, it is a question not so much of abstract doctrines as of psychological facts.

You may rebuke the Hindu philosophers for having sacrificed the many to the One and thus boldly cut the Gordian knot of ontology and metaphysics. But you cannot deny that they have raised the hereafter of mortals to the level of the immortal. Thus, while the aim was not reached in Egypt, in India it was overreached. But there as here we find the same profound but scarcely conscious need of stabilizing human destiny by the assumption of an endless duration.

Buddhism, with its morbid tendency toward final annihilation, confirms the argument that all men strongly desire immortality.

As is well known, Buddhism is not homogeneous. It is manifold, and has many strata. Its fundamental articles: the pain of existence, the extinction of all desire, Nirvâna, take on different aspects according to schools and ages. There is the Buddhism of Buddha. There is a Buddhism of the "Little Vehicle" and a Buddhism of the "Great Vehicle," and each of these two "Vehicles" is split into many more or less disparate fragments.

Buddha's personal belief on the last end of man is obscure and hard to define. Had he a clear concept of Nirvâna? We do not know, but tradition has it that he never declared himself on the subject. As we know it, his teaching is mainly negative. To understand it we again have to place ourselves on psychological ground.

Buddha is human without ever ceasing to be a Hindu. He is a man who with pitiless pessimism has fathomed the nothingness of existence, has keenly felt the vanity of all earthly things, has seen the instability of life, has desired to escape from the universal wreckage and to enter into eternal rest.

Imagine a ball suspended by a thread and turning in a circle around the hand which holds the other end of the thread. Suddenly the thread snaps, the circle is broken, and the ball falls down. Somehow such is Buddhism as it was at first and as it is now. Man indefinitely travels round and round in the circle that encloses his sad terrestrial existence. Desire is the thread which holds him captive. Suppress desire, and the thread snaps. Man disappears. Whither? Buddhism cannot tell, Buddhism will not tell, because to define the aim in earthly terms would be to bring Nirvâna down to the level of this abhorred earthly existence and thereby to revive the desire and resume the chain of suffering. With our Western logic we quickly arrive at the idea of absolute annihilation. But the Hindu brain, like the Egyptian, is more complex or less exacting than ours. Nirvâna lies beyond "existence," and this means that it is indefinable. But it exists, and we may be sure that it has nothing in common with the exasperating whirlwind which blows us to and fro. It is the final rest that knows no change. It is eternal peace. True, it is not a very radiant immortality that is symbolized in the peaceful attitude of a sleeping Buddha; and yet, is it not a foreboding or intimation of true immortality? And if its appeal is vague, is it not because the "divine" fails to appear? But patience—the "divine" will appear!

Buddha's disciples did not relish the austere agnosticism of their master. They were eager to know. Several of them, by introducing the cumbrous machinery of philosophic systematization into the tenuous psychology of Buddha, which, moreover, they misunderstood, sank into the slough of despondency. It was then that the doctrine of final annihilation, for the first time perhaps, found some adepts.

But a portentous reaction soon set in. Under the influence of this reaction, Eastern Buddhism received its classic form and popularity. Several causes have led to this development, which cannot be attributed solely to the excesses of dissident sects. The movement, vast like a gigantic river, could have just as well passed for reaction against the agnosticism of the founder himself.

Had not Buddha brought back the gods to the rank of mere mortals, attaching them, like all other beings, to the wheel of a sorrowful existence, and subjecting them to the law that demands the extinction of desire?

How silly to try to rob the masses of their faith in the indestructible vitality of the gods! A few centuries elapse, and Buddha himself is worshipped as a god and following him are numberless legions of bodhisattvas, who rise step by step to the luminous regions where the deified master is enthroned with his avatars. A strange reminder this of the rush of Egyptian souls striving to enter the bark of the sun-god.

In the shadow of these majestic Buddhas and under the protection of their presence, Buddhism has come to a definite rest. But what of Nirvâna? The ancient Nirvâna of the master retires more and more into the depths of an inaccessible future. It has gone into the background of religious preoccupations. It is an empty frame, a yawning chasm, opening into a world that no longer attracts the curious. The true Nirvâna is a lotus paradise, floating on the limpid waters of a dreamy lake, redolent with divine perfumes and endless happiness. Thus is hope born again to the religious soul in recovering her immortal gods.

I could add to these examples, showing how, at the dawn of the Christian era, a much more definite craving for immortality arises, for instance, in the religions connected with Orphism and the cult of Dionysus. But the task would be too easy and our opponents would object that it is not fair to build up a rule on exceptions.

What I have tried to establish in this brief survey is that the absence of formal and explicit testimonies in favor of the immortality of the human soul would not constitute a decisive proof against the existence of this belief in the religions of antiquity.

The dead letter is not all. There is the spirit, there is the animating tendency, the flame of the ideal which runs through the moving mass of facts. If humanity had been stationary, if it had stood still on a restricted and well-defined group of irreformable ideas and rites, we should be condemned to indecision. But humanity has moved, and the direction of its movement has revealed the secret of its profoundest aspirations, of its restlessness, of its never satisfied desires. The very clumsiness of the movement and the fact that it has not reached its goal shows that immortality is not only not foreign to the human race, but man is slowly marching towards it, led by his faith in the indefectibility of the gods.

And this is the reason why, when Christianity at length spoke clearly on this point through its dogmas, the peoples joyfully welcomed the good tidings. It is the reason why, for twenty centuries, millions and millions of men have lived according to that teaching proclaimed by Christ and why, even to-day, generations of believers arise to defend their faith in eternal life against the onslaughts of materialism. This faith, this conviction, is in our blood; it is anchored to the core of our very being; in a word, it is human.

3

We readily grant that the history of religions testifies to the existence in man of an aspiration towards another world, more or less vaguely and instinctively conceived as an abode of immortal souls. But does it establish as clearly the real, external, objective existence of such an abode?

How do we know that faith in Immortality is not an illusion—useful and beneficent, perhaps—but an illusion which the progress of Science will oblige us some day to get rid of?

The followers of radical evolutionism cast this doubt into a concrete form. Everything in nature, they say, is subject to the law of change. There are no fixed species, and religion is no exception to this rule. Religion represents a stage, a phase of the process of the world's evolution. When that stage is passed, man (or whatever you may call the being which will succeed him in the series of future creations) will know no religion. Together with religion will disappear that craving for immortality raised by Nature as a fata morgana to satisfy man's need for action; it will probably be replaced by another mirage no less useful and equally deceiving.

At the outset of my first discourse I gave the reason why radical evolutionism is unacceptable. I shall not return to that subject, but I would like to show that the followers of the theory in question gravely err, if they think they have been successful in banishing the thought of religion.

They believe in universal movement, for such is the minimum meaning of the word evolution. Now every movement has two terms: that from which it comes, and that whither it goes. It matters not whether these terms be relative or absolute, real or unreal. In any hypothesis, to move is to go from one point to another, or to pass from one state to another.

Of the two terms, that which interests us the more psychologically is not that whence we come, but that whither we go. Automobilists, when going at full speed, think more of what lies ahead than of what they have left behind.

Now plunge into this universal flux called evolution, and suppose that in a certain being—in man, for instance—evolution becomes a conscious process.

This consciousness will manifest itself by direct experience, by feeling, more or less diffuse, by the intuition of an uninterrupted flow of reality. (Every evolutionist will admit this, especially if he follows Bergson.) Consciousness of the evolutionary process will manifest itself most of all by the sensation of a march in advance, an urge, and by the expectation of something impending. What is this, if not the preoccupation of a hereafter? A strange hereafter, which does not yet exist; a mysterious hereafter, every step towards which is a leap into the unknown. But it is a real hereafter, since it takes shape and form at every moment of its duration. Indeed, it is neither remote nor foreign, for it is yourself, since you yourself are the result of evolution. Every moment it is you who emerge into futurity. You transform yourself in the process, it is true, but your new state is so closely connected with that which preceded, the transition is so cleverly conducted, that you retain the sensation and the experience of yourself in a slow *fieri* which carries you along. Hence, there exists a hereafter which specially and personally concerns you.

I go farther. I daresay you do not pretend to be the starting-point of universal evolution, which has many faces and degrees *ad infinitum*. Some of these are behind you. Why may there not also be some ahead of you? Why in the midst of the Universe may there not be beings more highly evolved, more conscious, more intelligent, and more robust than you, playing towards such stragglers as yourself the rôle of those superior intellects and forces which humanity salutes as guides and initiators of progress? And what is it that forbids you to offer a prayer and to appeal to those mysterious powers, marching in the vanguard of evolution, which are not necessarily deaf, blind, or malevolent?

You believe that evolution has freed you from the haunting expectation of a hereafter? But that expectation dogs you more closely than ever, and religious sentiment, which is, at the least, the feeling of a hereafter, claims a right to an abode within you. Its disappearance from your soul would mean that universal evolution is in sorry distress.

But all men are not evolutionists, though, as a general rule, all recognize in human nature the characters of a fixed species, immutable in essence, but perfectible by a proper use of its innate faculties.

From this aspect, then, let us return to a consideration of the testimony of the history of religions in favor of Immortality.

In bringing to a close our historical enquiry a little while ago, we perforce arrived at the conclusion that the belief in Immortality is essentially "human." Here you have the whole question in a nutshell.

What is human is peculiar to the human species; for instance, the will and the intellect.

Human means a character that cannot be suppressed without attacking the being endowed with it in its very structure.

Human is something that is always present, always recognizable in man, even though it manifest itself in an imperfect and embryonic manner.

Does the sentiment, the conviction of a hereafter, answer this description?

A quick way to make sure of the answer would be to proceed by deduction. Once the nature of man has been correctly defined, a simple argument leads us to conclude that his nature is endowed with Immortality. This is known as the metaphysical argument, which will presently have the predominant place that it deserves in our study. For the time being we remain on the ground of experience and historic reality. Amid these conditions the only criterion we may legitimately make use of is the universality of fact.

If the religious sentiment, with its twofold orientation towards the divine and towards life after death, is found everywhere and always, this means that we are dealing not with an adventitious and superficial trait, but with an essential property of human nature.

It is true that the ultimate explanation of this characteristic—the reason why it is essentially connected with human nature—has not yet been given us. But the connection is as firmly established as, for instance, the close affinity between the human individual and society.

Man at first blush seems nailed to the earth by the special decree of an inflexible Fate. He depends on the earth for his numberless needs. The earth occupies him, engrosses his attention, absorbs him with its cares of to-day and to-morrow; cares of food, family, ambitions and passions. The earth is to him the rough arena of an incessant struggle. It is also the whirlwind which carries and twists him in the choking folds of a heavy shroud. Harassed, submerged, he reels and writhes. But the earth is stronger and finally vanquishes him. He falls under her clasp, and she covers him for ever.

And yet, this man, whose horizon is so narrow and low, is scarcely awakened to conscious life when he straightway looks with anguish and confidence towards the hereafter.

In spite of the bitter and perpetual lesson of things; in spite of the evidence which brutally reminds him every day of his terrestrial destiny; in spite of the spectacle of never-ending death which seems to terminate all human existence: man climbs up the walls of his gaol and by thought, faith, and hope lives indefectibly in an invisible world. An intimate force, an imperious certitude, softens the sorrowful vision of his present state and of that ungrateful earth on which he suffers, weeps, and dies. And it is not once only that this singular phenomenon arises. From age to age it is found in all the stages of civilization. It is of to-day and of yesterday. It exists among all races and in all lands. Wherever man appears, the haunting vision of the earth is eclipsed by the thought of the hereafter.

What more is needed to make us acknowledge that this belief is profoundly and universally human? If it were not so, then we should have to deny that we can have any self-knowledge and regard all psychological research as vain. But if it *is* human, we must be brave and loyal enough to draw the inevitable consequences.

Man is subject to hunger. This, I suppose, is a proposition based on observed facts. A paradoxical philosopher rises and declares that the need of food is an illusion, because if it were real, there would always be food somewhere to satisfy man's hunger. Imagine the surprise with which such a declaration would be received.

Is hunger an illusion? It certainly is not on the part of him who is hungry. Nor is it an illusion on the part of the food demanded by hunger. Men have unfortunately been known to die of hunger. But this is a rare exception. Nature—or, more correctly, Nature's God—who feeds the little birds and nourishes the roses, has not allowed such a monstrous lack of equilibrium to endanger his work. It is not hunger which created food. But surely, if man is hungry, it is because outside himself, in the concrete reality of things, there exists food to nourish him.

Would it be rash to generalize and to lay down, at least empirically, the principle that to every natural need there corresponds the object necessary to its satisfaction?

I say: to every natural need, not to every artificial need; for it were easy and very unjust to draw absurd conclusions from this common-sense truth.

But I hear the objection: Have we the right to generalize thus? Where only material needs are at stake, the victory is easy. Have we not before us at the same time both the need and its corresponding object?

Is perceptibility by the naked eye, then, necessary to convince us?

Think for a moment and you will acknowledge that such an exaction would be unfair.

Take another example. Man is a social being. He cannot live without the collaboration of his fellows. He is made for society. His social need is a fact that can be proved by observation. Practically the need is satisfied, and society answers this natural need.

Have you seen society with your eyes? In a way, yes, for it is visible. None the less, does not the idea of society imply a certain number of abstract elements? A notion of an order or a hierarchy? Economic laws, government, administration, etc.? The social need, therefore, introduces you into a world somewhat less material than the world of purely physical needs.

Go farther. Man needs the truth. He seeks it and somehow finds it. But what is the truth? A conformity of the intellect with the reality through the medium of correct ideas. Have you ever seen the intellect? Have you seen an idea? No, for they do not fall under the senses.

Such is the principle. There is, as it were, a pre-established harmony between a need, a tendency of nature, and the reality corresponding to them. In this sense it may be said, without accepting the vagaries of subjectivism, that a need and a tendency of nature testify to the reality of their objects.

Man could not be hungry if he could not find food to appease his appetite. Man could not be social if society were impossible. He could not crave for the truth if the truth were a chimera. And I add: man could not have a religious sentiment if religion had not a real basis outside of him. He could not aspire to a hereafter if there were no hereafter. He could not long for Immortality if it were a sheer illusion.

That, at times, the religious sentiment loses itself on fallacious objects; that man has an inaccurate image of survival over death; that he does not straightway rise to the authentic concept of an endless duration, we readily admit; but such deviations and gropings prove nothing but the weakness of our race, or, if you prefer, its aptitude for progress.

We, the sons of an age that is too proud of its attainments, believe we have made a memorable discovery in the formula which seems to be our most beautiful title of nobility. Progress, we say, is the law of humanity. We have simply transformed a negative trait into a positive perfection. Our ability to make progress merely means that we are powerless to reach our aim with one leap.

But beyond our failures, hesitations, and errors reality remains and attracts us like a mysterious magnet. From the very chaos of our partial illusions the face of truth extricates itself like the white light from a rapidly moving wheel, whereon are inscribed the seven colors of the spectrum.

Thus the testimony of the ancient religions is not to be despised by a man who is anxious to know his future destiny. It does not afford the highest kind of evidence; but it enables us to look to the future with reasonable confidence.

To the silent testimony that comes from the infinite solitudes of heaven, the religious conscience of mankind adds its canticle of hope. But there are still other voices to be heard.

III

MAN

Religions bear witness to a fact of world-wide extent and singular character, namely, that religiously minded men—and they exist everywhere, as they have at all times—live on the thought and hope of a life beyond the grave. The unconquerable firmness of their faith places them on the boundary of two worlds—the one visible, the other invisible. The positive content of this faith may vary, but the primeval and essential fact remains. It is human, a part of man's nature. Both experience and reason tell us that no need of nature remains frustrated; each has its object. To that need, to that religious feeling, there must correspond a reality, an object, namely, another world and another life. To reject this inference, we must either claim for man, and to his detriment, an exception to the general law, or deny the universal character of the fact. The former is an arbitrary and unlikely hypothesis; the latter is in flat contradiction to history.

In this lecture we will try to open a broader vista of the serene regions of Immortality. In our last we heard the testimony of religious man. Let us now gather that of man as such.

How shall we open this vista? Shall we invoke the idea of progress, which seems to assign a place apart to the human family in creation? Shall we emphasize the inference that a being able to rise so high, to affirm his domination over nature's blind forces, to play with water, air, and fire, shows himself superior to the material surroundings in which he lives, and claims a "supernatural" origin in the strictly etymological sense of this word?

This theme would be easy to develop. Even though we believe ourselves to be sceptical, we remain accessible to flattery. And who knows whether, by dint of praise and flattery, the most obstinately incredulous person would not succeed in persuading himself that he is immortal, under the great blue vault of heaven?

Then it would be easy also to show the emptiness of this so-called Immortality. Progress goes forward. And those who promote it in the sweat of their brow or at the price of their blood, one after another go down to their graves. Occasionally they live in the memory of their fellowmen. A mediocre compensation indeed, that Immortality of pantheons and graveyards! This is not the Immortality which we are bold enough to crave.

Indeed, we can make use of a better instrument.

Do you wish to know what is the great obstacle that might prevent us, dwellers on this earth, from conceiving the true structure of the universe? It is the sun.

If the sun never descended beneath the horizon, if it ceaselessly dazzled us with its victorious splendor, what could we know about the stars? Nothing. With the utmost good faith, we might think that our sun was the only sun in the universe, a trusty servant devoted exclusively to our service.

What is needed to expel this illusion? Night. Deep night, discreetly luminous night, where our sister planets shine, and millions of suns like ours palpitate.

So is it with our present problem. Do you wish to know whether man carries in himself a promise, a germ of Immortality? Be not satisfied with contemplating him on the dazzling summits whither his genius takes him. For, to understand man well, night is required. You must follow him into this darkness and see him struggle there in misery, impotence, and distress. Then, perhaps, you may see the sweet glimmer of immortal regions shining forth in this beneficent darkness.

But let us speak without figures. Man on earth is an incomplete and unfinished being. That is why we believe in life after death.

I

Incomplete, unfinished! What do you mean? That human nature in its physical or psychological structure betrays the lack of proportion and balance characteristic of failure? Not at all. Man is not a failure in this sense. If he were, he would have disappeared long ago, crushed in the struggle for life which is the inevitable lot of all creatures here below.

One need not be a follower of Darwin to acknowledge that an organism unable to adapt itself to its surroundings cannot subsist. In the course of geological ages, many vegetable and animal species have disappeared, because they were too dependent on the environment in which they began to exist and therefore could not adapt themselves to the new conditions brought about by the slow evolution of the universe.

Man, on the contrary, is endowed with a truly surprising flexibility of adaptation. He survives all trials; he acclimates himself everywhere, amid ice and snow as well as in the torrid equatorial regions. Under most varied circumstances, his genius suggests the means, not only to withstand the attacks of raging elements and escape the annihilation of his race, but also to take advantage of the different surroundings in which he is placed, and thereby improve his condition, transform his habitat, and secure his welfare.

Further, he can escape causes of destruction which he has himself raised. He survives hecatombs of bloody wars, as well as vices which at times threaten to pull him down into decrepitude and decay. You think he is breathing his last, and lo, he re-arises, with new blood infused by younger and less corrupt races coursing through his veins. He starts again, more robust than ever.

To conquer his prodigious vitality, there would have to be an unheard-of cataclysm overwhelming the planet on which he lives. If he were but a hasty, improvised, transitory product of Nature, would he possess such strength and flexibility? Were he a failure, the attacks of the external world and his own mistakes would have exterminated him long ago.

No, it is not his essence which justifies this incomplete and unfinished character that we attribute to him.

Where does this deficiency appear? In the contrast between man's possibilities and the realizations with which he has to be satisfied. Man realizes only partially what he is capable of doing. Or rather, what he realizes is as nothing compared with what he would like to realize.

These possibilities are neither abstract nor unconscious. They are found and become crystallized in a new aspiration, a new need, as deep and as human as the religious need and sentiment, namely, the craving for happiness—absolute, unbounded, and everlasting happiness.

I know this theme has been so often harped on that it has become commonplace. But what does this matter, so it contains an undeniable teaching and an eternal truth?

And if, after all, this commonplace were but a cloak for emptiness? May not this famous theme belong to the antiquated stock of rhetorical exercises, good only for sharpening the wits of declaimers and training them in eloquence? Have we not grown familiar with this hymn to perfect happiness, by hearing it repeated over and over again? Who knows whether we are not merely repeating the stanzas after the manner of humming old tunes that women used to sing at night while weaving wool—sentimental and touching ballads which we know are but dream and poetry? Matter-of-fact men as we are, we would be ashamed to attach any importance to them. They amuse us, as pretty trinkets might. We preserve them as family heirlooms of a past which is no longer—remnants of a childhod forever gone. May not the song of happiness be one of those curious, attractive, old-fashioned trinkets? Is it even worth being tested by that cold, insolent criticism which nowadays spares nothing: neither the tenderness of maternal love nor the sublime heroism of charity and sacrifice?

Granted. Let us try. This will perhaps be the best way to avoid the commonplace.

So we of to-day, "born too late into a world that has grown too old," have assumed towards happiness an attitude of moderation and wisdom which does honor to our training as men of sense and to the rigorous exactitude of our scientific methods. We know from experience that the sum-total of the joys which life holds in store for us is limited. But, however limited it is, we hold it and are satisfied with it. To fancy another kind of happiness which would consist in possessing an inalienable, transcendent Good, is a ridiculous and dangerous utopia.

It is a ridiculous utopia. By what right could we claim this happiness? Nothing, absolutely nothing, either within us or outside us, can prompt us to demand it. Is not our life, as well as the development of our personality, bounded by two well-defined mathematical limits: the moment of our birth and that of our death? Within this short span of time we are buffeted by life's chances. Each one tries to derive from life the maximum of enjoyment that his aptitudes and circumstances enable him to obtain. In this lottery some gain a little more than they lose, while others lose a little more than they gain. Whether we are treated with liberality or parsimony, whether we are lucky or unlucky, our lot will necessarily be finite, since it is confined to a finite duration. To ask for more is to demand that the ocean be poured into a nutshell.

It is a dangerous utopia. There is nothing to be gained by abandoning the prey for its shadow. The prospect of an impossible happiness may prevent us from acquiring immediate, tangible, and therefore real happiness. Those mystic dreams of everlasting beatitude discredit our truest joys. They inspire us with contempt and disgust for these joys, and encompass human life with an atmosphere of uneasiness, suspicion, and anxiety. While we wear out our eyes interrogating the empty heavens, the days pass and death comes, and man departs, a double victim of his credulity: for he has failed to taste the one happiness he could possess, and will not reach the fallacious happiness he has anticipated.

Let us do away with such utopias. The era of Paradise is forever closed. The hymn of perfect happiness is a siren song; and sirens no longer disport themselves in the wake of our frail barks.

Indeed, our wisdom has become singularly matter-of-fact, and the knife of criticism has cut deeply into our ancient hopes. But it is doubtful that we are resigned to a finite happiness sparingly compressed into the narrow span between the cradle and the grave.

You have lost a beloved friend. Did you grieve at his death? Did you weep? A strange question, you may say. Of course we grieved and wept, because parting with our dear ones is painful and distressing.

But did your scientists not tell you that, since the human organism is made up of cells which originate, live, and die, you must inevitably, some time or other, part with those whom you love? You knew it with mathematical certainty, as it were. And yet you complained! You should not have complained or wept. Let us come to cold realities. Do you realize the meaning of your tears? They are a protest of your heart, of your whole bewildered being. A protest against whom or what? Probably against that apparently blind and cruel fate which condemns every living being to die. This is the meaning of your tears. And this is also why, when in the darkness of sleepless nights the thought of death—of your own death or of the death of those near and dear to you—rises up suddenly before you with the implacable certitude of an unavoidable catastrophe, a thrill of horror grips you and shakes you, and you can hardly refrain from the terrified cry: "I must die!"

The rigorous logic of your scientific conclusions and wise speculations on the joys of life will not prevent your weeping over the loss of those near and dear to you, nor, when you have done away with an artificial Stoicism, will it prevent your hearing the voice of instinct which, deep down in your inmost soul, rebels against the law of death.

And this, you must confess, poisons the joys of the present life even more than do the dreams of mysticism.

Is not the contradiction evident? Your "critical" reason may teach you the relativity of earthly life;

but it does not quench your thirst for living. It cannot keep you from experiencing this feeling—one of the most troublesome mysteries of human psychology—a feeling at first sight so common and still so vain, though to your mind superfluous—the feeling of regret.

Yes, regret: a subtle poison which, in spite of ourselves, permeates the cup of all our joys: joys of the senses and joys of the heart, joys of the intellect and joys of action. It is a strange disease which accomplishes its dissolving work without our being aware of it; an unavoidable companion ever present, even when we do not think of him, one that may rise up unexpectedly on the wayside as a robber watching for travellers.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that our life is spent in regrets. On the contrary, we are habitually full of confidence, our heart is elated with hope. We talk and act as if this life were never to end. But the enemy needs not harry us constantly in order to hurt us. Let him appear from time to time, and lo! a veil of sadness and melancholy is thrown over us! Like clouds borne by the wind in a clear sky, causing an ugly shadow to scurry over our sunny fields, regret pursues, overtakes, and passes us, and changes the dazzling splendor of our earthly joys into a dull gray landscape. Still we should not regret, since we know full well that joy here below is measured and finite.

Picture to yourself the most perfectly happy man you can conceive, a man possessing everything he desires: vigor, beauty, wealth, genius, virtue, the sympathy of his fellowmen and their devoted friendship. Never has he been calumniated, or envied, or betrayed. And by a still more wonderful good fortune, death has spared his dear ones. Is this man really happy? An insoluble question, since in fact such a man has never existed and will never exist. Yet, strange to say, mankind insisted on asking this useless question, and it is worth knowing what solution was offered. It was a negative solution.

You may say that to attribute this negative solution to all mankind is a hasty generalization. The solution to which I refer is that doctrine of the nothingness of this present life which Christianity circulated so many centuries ago and which sent millions of men and women to the solitude of cloisters and the path of sheer abnegation. But Christianity is not mankind; and was it not Christianity which, by superadding a superhuman to the earthly ideal, aroused in us the appetite for an impossible happiness?

I might reply that Christendom is more than an insignificant fraction of the human family; and that if it has succeeded in implanting its principles of self-denial in many elect souls, no one can deny that, from the merely human point of view, those principles very likely corresponded to a craving and a need of human nature. But this reply might not seem impartial enough. I prefer to choose my examples from outside the Christian pale.

The idea of a perfectly happy man whose heart is devoured by the most incurable sadness, is not an exclusive creation of Christian thought. All through the Far East, from India to Japan, from Corea to the Sunda Islands, everywhere you hear the following beautiful and touching legend. There was a certain young prince favored with the rarest gifts. He was free from care and led an enchanting life in his splendid palace. Fatherly solicitude had spared his eyes the vision of life's hardest necessities. But one day this young man, driving a golden car, passed through the gates of his park and entered the open country. What did he see? He met, one after the other, an old man heavily laden with years, an invalid on his pallet, and a corpse being carried out for burial. At this threefold spectacle, the prince felt so troubled that, unable to resist this mysterious fear, he abandoned his palace and his wealth, his subjects and his country, his wife and children, and fled into the wild forest, where, divesting himself of his royal garments, he practiced strict asceticism until, believing that he had found salvation, he started to preach the emptiness of life and the renunciation of the joys of the world. You will at once recognize this story: it is the legend of Buddha.

Legend, not history, you say. Are you sure? The case of Buddha may have been embellished and amplified. But it is not unreal. Long before the son of Sakyamuni was born, there was current in the north of India a time-honored tradition that the head of a family, after giving life to many children, was bound to leave his home and devote his last years to solitude and to the meditation of eternal truths. Buddha revived the tradition in accentuating the meaning which it already had in the thought of his countless predecessors.

But if you insist, I will grant that all is legendary in this narrative. It does not matter. The extraordinary thing is that such a legend could originate in a human mind, and be received, admired, and cherished by the more numerous and more intellectual half of the population of Asia.

The legend of Buddha, the legend of a perfectly happy man who becomes dissatisfied with human happiness and disgusted with the purest joys, and goes after a still more ideal good, the absolute Good —this legend of a man to whom the most complete and most desirable happiness is an occasion of suffering, brought a thrill to the soul of Hindus, Chinese, Japanese, and countless others.

With some differences of thought, which need not be dwelt upon here, those throngs join the great multitude of Christian souls. And from this sea of human souls surges a mighty cry, a strange protest against the perishableness of human joys, a desperate call to another kind of happiness which is not of this world.

Should you deem this unanimity unconvincing, resume your exploration through the ages. In the atria of imperial Rome; on the stage where Greek tragedians rehearsed the implacable fatality of destiny and the jealousy of the gods; under the domes of Persian palaces, in the tents of nomadic Arabs, and on the throne of the Great Moguls, from Constantinople to Bagdad, from Cordova to Samarcand, everywhere can be heard the same complaint emanating from the lyre of poets and the grave thought of philosophers—the plaint of terror or homesickness. Indeed mankind, not that crude portion which is plunged into the darkness of obscurantism, but that conscious, refined portion which is drunk with luxury and satiated with enjoyment both of the flesh and of the spirit, voices its everlasting disenchantment and its incurable regret.

And you yourselves, men of the twentieth century, saturated with civilization, whose eyes have been opened by Science and who thought you could enclose the equation of total and rational happiness within the narrow limits of the present life—your complaints prolong the cry of past centuries in spite of yourselves.

At every fresh disappointment, at every jolt of the road, when the miserable particle of happiness conquered at the cost of much effort slips through your fingers; when illness threatens you and death is near, striking mercilessly all around before dealing you the fatal blow—you cease, as you say, being "reasonable" and become human again, that is, you stumble against the contradiction which opposes your cravings for the ideal, and feel powerless.

The true, the eternal man desires more than he possesses, and his hope is without bounds. In vain does he try to convince himself of illusion. In vain does he try to dispel the dream by dint of sophisms. The illusion remains. It is stubborn. You might call it a congenital and hereditary infirmity, were you not aware of the fact that the being which suffers from it, represents the strongest organism found in nature, the one best equipped to sustain the struggle for life.

At times the contradiction seems to soften and fade away, and the soul opens up to endless horizons. Perhaps I am wrong, but it seems to me that this state of mind finds its deepest and most faithful expression in music. Do not be surprised if I introduce art into our philosophical meditations. Indeed, since you desire to catch in its full amplitude the craving of the human race for a reality which this earth is unable to give, it is not in the tumult of daily cares, in the conflict of material interests, in the bitterness of the battles of life that you will find its most striking image. Man here reveals the earthly side of his nature. Take him rather in those moments when he is more completely himself, when his genius expands, like a bird that spreads its wings after painfully dragging itself along the ground.

First of all, does it not seem strange that there is such a thing as art?

What is art? The expression of beauty. And what is beauty? A transposition of the real into the ideal.

But art is something more. It is a means of fixing beauty and the ideal into indelible traits.

Those fleeting visions of splendor and harmony, divine echoes which man catches as they elusively float on the surface of an ever-changing world, and which he wishes to capture at all costs and ennoble still more, are, when thus transformed by art, incarnations of his supraterrestrial dream. By art, man has access to a better world and comes into touch with something greater than the realities of this earthly life.

Nowhere is this need of escaping the grip of the present more clearly manifested than in music. Here the artistic form, having at its service neither the precision of architectural lines nor the outlines of design and colors, frees itself still more completely from the bonds of matter and dilates, as it were, *ad infinitum.* The most genial musician is often unaware of the heights which he can reach. The emotion which he imparts to us extends as the waves of a lake softly stirred by the evening breeze. And we are taken far away—so much so that a strange sense of peaceful repose invades our being, and at the moment when the solitary melody comes to an end, we painfully return to ourselves, as we might wake from a slumber enraptured by marvelous dreams.

Is not the fact that the human mind did spontaneously invent art, and especially that it created the sublime art of sounds, a sign that we feel the contrast between our actual condition and our true destiny? Man's sublime *élan* towards beauty has the same meaning as the cry of anguish and the protest against the emptiness of earthly pleasures. In both cases, man tries to escape towards a better world, in search of the good for which he craves and which life cannot give him. This is why we call him an unfinished, incomplete being. Such is the fact. But this fact must not be merely registered; it must also be interpreted.

2

At first sight the task seems difficult, especially if this interpretation is to be made in behalf of the idea of a life after death. But before coming to this conclusion, we have to examine several hypotheses and will do so with as much impartiality as possible. Let us first take the most obvious and consequently most plausible explanation. Mankind craves an ever-fleeting happiness. Hence suffering and unsatisfied desires. Now is it necessary, in order to account for such cravings and pangs, to have recourse to a transcendent aspiration towards a supraterrestrial happiness?

The account is to be settled in this world and not in another. To our mind, the present life ought to give us a certain amount of enjoyment and a certain kind of happiness. It does not. If life smiled on us, lamentation would cease and the world would smile in return. But since, alas! this hypothesis is not likely to be verified, it is impossible to ascertain just what is meant by this craving for happiness. No one can tell which is meant, the present or the future, time or eternity. Such ambiguity could be suppressed only if it were possible to isolate absolutely from all other factors the need of which we speak. Now, such isolation cannot be obtained by any psychological reagent: the problem therefore remains insoluble.

But is it as insoluble as is claimed? No. It would be insoluble only if it presented itself experimentally in ambiguous terms. But it does not. Mankind has known long before our time how to apply precise and rigorous logic. Mankind did not wait for us before examining the problem of happiness under all its aspects. Mankind was not satisfied with hurling the reproach of infidelity and treason at this present life. Mankind did not say: Indeed the balance of earthly joys ends regularly with a deficit; but if this deficit were paid up, we should stop complaining and be satisfied. Mankind's attitude is altogether different. Having clearly foreseen all the chances of happiness that life could possibly supply, mankind considered the hypothesis in which the present life would have given out all that could reasonably be expected, and declared that, even then, men would not be satisfied, but would demand more.

The famous legend of the man satiated with the goods of the world, who abandons all—family, power, wealth—admits of no other interpretation. This legend poetizes and dramatizes the situation. But under this drama and this poetry we hear the verdict that forever settles the relations of man with his earthly surroundings. Whatever may happen, man ferociously refuses to accept from this world the happiness for which he feels himself born.

You say: "This verdict must not be taken tragically. It is merely the upshot of accumulated disappointments. Have you not occasionally, under the impression of a particularly painful sorrow or trial, cursed life and felt a deep disgust for it? But this impression fades away gradually and we begin to love again this same life which we cursed; we cling to it with the energy of a drowning man clinging to a spar. Thus mankind, regularly disappointed, regularly vents its bitterness and spite, but the very next moment finds consolation in building castles in the air. But the dreams of perfect happiness which it seems to locate in another world, do but express the hopes which it founds on this world and its indefectible attachment to this present life. Is not 'paradise' for most of us the embellished image of our earthly joys?"

This reasoning is unacceptable. Can it be possible that man is condemned to the regular and perpetual failure of his most legitimate hopes? Stones fall and attain their end by falling to the ground, where their weight keeps them. Animals are born, develop, feed, multiply, and thus attain their end. In all nature man would be the only exception to this law of harmony, which is also, as we shall see later, a law of justice. He would be the only one to miss his aim. For to all practical intents he misses it, since, in the very hypothesis under consideration, he is always dissatisfied with his earthly condition. Indeed he has good reasons for dissatisfaction; and it is quite natural that, having failed so many times, he should come to the conclusion that his true aim is beyond this earth and that this present life is a snare and an illusion.

But we must go farther and explain why mankind is so bitterly dissatisfied. On this point it is easy enough to learn from experience. Man's sadness and everlasting regret arise from the instability of his present happiness. What spoils his purest joys—both of the mind and of the heart—is the knowledge that they cannot last, the certitude that some day the final period will be inserted by a hand that never trembles, never fails to affix its signature at the close of the covenant between man and the present life. I mean Death. Not only the death that brusquely stops budding hopes and effective realizations, but also that which journeys slowly and mutely performs its work of destruction through the buffetings of life, sickness, and old age with its progressive weakening of our faculties of enjoyment.

Man has felt all this. He has drunk the cup of his impotence to the very dregs. In fact, he drinks it every day, every moment, for each fleeting instant passes as a swift and lugubrious messenger, warning him that the fatal date is approaching when the covenant will be broken and death will recover all its rights over him.

And still we are so constituted that stability and permanency appear to us as essential conditions of happiness. But though this present life cannot give man the stability which he craves, no matter how dearly he loves it and how desperately he clings to it, still he cannot trust it. And when he contrasts, as he is bound to do some time, what life gives him with what his being craves for above all things, he kicks and rebels, and the revolt ends in a sob.

No, the ambiguity of human craving for happiness is not an insoluble problem. Disappointments, friction, suffering, all these do not result merely in a lack of balance between our purely earthly needs and the satisfactions that this life so grudgingly apportions. All these things signify also, and much more emphatically, the incurable opposition existing between the craving for eternal happiness and the relativity and perpetual insufficiency of earthly goods. Man craves for a happiness that does not pass away, whereas this present life can offer only transient enjoyment. This is the antinomy that must be explained.

An explanation is offered by another theory, which we shall now examine. For we desire not to draw any conclusion regarding life after death and Immortality, before exhausting every means of avoiding this hypothesis. Not that it would be undesirable.

But it is preferable that it should impose itself upon our mind as the only acceptable solution.

We are told that it is possible to solve the apparent contradiction without going beyond this world. Man is a perfectible being, but as yet is far from the summit of that perfection which he can and will some day infallibly reach. Sufficiently evolved to have a glimpse and an intimation of the future, he is not sufficiently developed to impress the image of his noble ideal upon reality. Hence this chafing and impatience. Still civilization is progressing all the time. What will its future achievements be? We can hardly dare to predict it. But what is at stake with human possibilities is so great that all hopes, even the seemingly most absurd, appear to become legitimate. The magnitude of the progress accomplished during the last twenty years in certain domains surely authorizes a bold optimism.

The triumphs of civilization are growing apace. Not that we entertain the slightest illusion as to the proximity of that scientific parousia which, we are told, is to replace the parousia of the ancient Messianic age. What we mean is simply this, that all limitations imposed upon dynamic progress are arbitrary. Man craves for a permanent happiness. This craving is not a mirage. It is too deeply engraven in him to be deceptive. It is truly the expression and the consciousness of a mighty power which needs only the collaboration of genius and circumstances in order to expand normally. The stability which we desire is bound to come. But how? By what means? This is the secret of the future. But the fact that we crave for it is a sign that it is promised us, not in the problematic world that haunts the imagination of the mystics, but in the world in which we actually live, and where our posterity will enjoy the fruit of our labors.

This reasoning, though boldly nebulous, is nevertheless somewhat captious. It starts from a real fact, namely, the unfinished and incomplete character of human activity. Then, rejecting the "other-world" solution of that crying antithesis, it limits the fulfillment of our desires to the plane of this earthly life and explains all by the magic virtue of Progress.

This explanation has at least one advantage: it squarely faces the initial data of the problem. The catechumens of the religion of progress do not ignore man's inborn craving for absolute happiness. They are honest and sincere. You can reason with them. For them, too, the dilemma seems to be this: Since man desires and craves for more than he possesses or can obtain from his actual condition, it follows that the conquest of absolute happiness will be realized either on this side of the grave or on the other. If, then, progress shows itself unable to fulfil the earthly hopes founded upon it, a life after death is the only acceptable solution.

But it does not seem possible to grant to the idea of earthly progress the credit and confidence which we are invited to show. The act of faith in that case would be groundless and unreasonable. Shall we have to appear as radically denying progress and its time-honored witness, civilization, in order to justify our reservations? Must we have recourse to the pessimistic and discouraging idea of stagnation and universal marking time by mankind?

The incline is dangerous. It easily leads to exaggeration and bombastic rhetoric. We do not need to fall into that snare. We affirm: Yes indeed, progress does exist. Civilization is a fact. We have no intention of sacrificing a particle of the splendid conquests made through the ages by the human mind, but will jealously guard the patrimony accumulated by past generations, from the far-distant stone age down to our own, exalted by the victories of Science. Every civilization, inasmuch as it is truly a civilization, is dear to us; and we gladly offer our homage of admiration and gratitude to all the workers, famous or unknown, who by their labor or talent have furnished our temporal dwelling-place, conquered matter, created beauty, organized social life, fought against misery and suffering, inspired our human clay with virtue and heroism.

But truth compels us to modify this enthusiastic hymn of praise somewhat. The dynamism of earthly progress is not inexhaustible. Like man himself, it is incomplete and unfinished, and will remain so forever.

Why? Here is the reason. It is easy enough to speak of progress, a word that conjures up wonderful hopes, the more so as it is vague. We demand precision. Is this progress definite or indefinite? It would be *indefinite* if every advance were the dawn of a new advance, with no halt or interruption. It would be *definite* if the goal had been conceived or determined beforehand, and if the advance would automatically come to a halt with the attainment of this goal.

Let us examine both hypotheses. If progress were indefinite, it would have no end, it would be aimless. This notion implies a contradiction, because progress *per se* implies a series of motions and acts connected by a law of order and harmony, a coördination of means and efforts in view of a determined perfection to be obtained. Progress is possible in reading, writing, arithmetic, moral virtue, in business or in rowing, or with the racket. If you suppress that determination which gives the motion its proper character and *raison d'être*, progress stops or is nothing more than a bizarre, chaotic, and inefficient agitation. It is no longer progress, but a mere stampede.

Now, in order to become intelligible, the notion of indefinite progress must necessarily sacrifice the precious attribute "indefinite." If indefinite, progress cannot be determined. And here lies the sophism. Nothing is gained by offering us progress as a succession of advances connected with one another by an uninterrupted and, as it were, unbreakable continuity. Consider each of these advances separately. If it is progressive at all, it implies an advance on the part of something. Call it artistic, scientific, or social progress. But if any one of these advances is connected with the following one, it is the preparation, the initial stage of the latter; so that this second one is rigorously determined or orientated towards a new term, and must be the progress of something.

Consider now the *ensemble* of all those connected advances. Since we suppose it to be *indefinite*, it possesses no precise determination, no coördination, no law of order and harmony. And we are forced to this rather intolerable conclusion that it is a progressive movement having its parts determined, but not the totality. This is a logical absurdity.

We must choose. Either the motion which carries mankind to its destiny has all the characteristics of genuine progress, and then it is definite both in its *ensemble* and its details; or this motion is indefinite, and then we must stop calling it progress. For, as a matter of fact, such motion were but a vain agitation and a stampede, and you would but insult poor mankind by offering so empty a food to its anguish and inquietude.

Mankind, with all its forces, and in spite of ceaseless disappointments, craves for a stable, absolute, definitive happiness. And in return it only receives an invitation not to trust itself to progress, because there is no progress, but to throw itself headlong into the abyss of the unknown, with the prospect of being submerged by an anonymous and formless ocean.

We cannot suppose that the defenders of progress would seriously maintain this proposition.

Therefore let us examine the second hypothesis. If progress is definite, that is to say, if it possesses an orientation, a goal, an aim, a *raison d'être*, then it must be possible to determine at least some of the conditions which it should have so that it may satisfy the deep and inborn cravings of human nature here on earth. We do not absolutely need to know all those conditions, for should one alone be lacking, the case is settled.

Now there is one condition on which mankind insists—stability. What spoils our earthly joys and inspires us with an unconquerable sense of sadness and regret, is our conviction of their incurable fragility. They fade away one after another like fleeting shadows. And, even if we were sure of their permanency during this present life, the fatal approach of death would be enough to dissipate our most tenacious illusions.

Suffering and death are the two enemies of our happiness here below. Now I bluntly ask: Does the marvelous programme of "definite" progress contain the suppression of suffering and death as an essential clause? Shall we become supermen? Will the future bring us discoveries compared to which radio, electric light, wireless telegraphy, Einstein's theories, and Bergson's philosophy would be like a child's play and a child's lisping? No matter. What we want to know is: will suffering and death still reign in the days to come?

No answer is needed. One must needs be absolutely numbed by naïveté to dream of ever suppressing suffering and death. Should you have any doubt left, ask the philosophers. They will explain to you that man, being a composite being, is bound to disintegrate. Would you rather trust the scientists of your own time? Is it not on their cruel irony that the multitude rests its touching faith in progress? Let me say this: There is no one more unwilling than scientists to grant you the conditions of progress that you believe to be indispensable to your happiness.

Stability! They exiled it from this world long ago and instead reconstructed the history of the living cell to show that nature is not eternal and that the atoms which compose it are susceptible of being dissociated and returning to no one knows where, perhaps to the primitive uniformity of ether! Indeed, authentic Science ignores our dreams of earthly stability and immortality. Not from Science can you expect the means of fulfilling your desire of doing away with death.

As to suffering, it will prove as invincible as death itself. No civilization has ever got rid of it, none ever will; for it arises from causes over which civilization has little or no control. The progress of civilization does not prevent our tears from falling on the tomb of our beloved ones. Nor will it prevent the free will of man from letting loose on the world the worst sort of evils.

Civilization claims the noble mission of diminishing the sum-total of evil. It promulgates wise laws, diffuses instruction, intensifies comfort. But even supposing that it remained constantly faithful to its task—which is far from being true—the opposition between free will and the obstinacy of nature's unconquered forces will always set insurmountable limits to its efforts.

Moreover, is not progress always and of necessity bound to pay heavy ransoms? How many corpses litter its way; how many ruins and miseries are accumulated by it! Progress requires immense sacrifices of human lives and, in attacks of folly, it even multiplies barbarity by science. Suffering is the ransom of progress in this sense also that, instead of satisfying our desires, it excites them by creating new needs every day. Progress falls on our souls like oil on fire. And this burning oil spurts out into a dust of refined, tyrannical exigencies, each one of which in turn becomes the cause of anxiety and suffering and, however strange this claim may appear, the occasion of universal cataclysms.

In olden times nations jumped at each other's throats for a matter of honor or to enlarge their territory. Nowadays there are more specific objects of war. Conflicts of imperialism? Not at all. Merely economic competition, which is but the façade of the unlimited greed begotten of our highly complicated civilization. We go to war for the sake of oil-fields, coal, zinc, pewter, iron. Over chapters of prehistory we read such titles as: bronze age, brass age, iron age; but posterity will have to give to the chapters of our history the names of: brass war, oil war, rubber war. Progress has been at work since those remote times. With the materials that our ancestors used with moderation, and others which they did not know, we have constructed the essential framework of our formidable organizations. We cannot go on without them, and as the stocks are limited, the conflict of needs entails a conflict of ambitions and the ferocious onrush of nations.

Some day perhaps civilization will die for having demanded from the earth more than it can give to satisfy man's earthly desires; unless, as so often happened in the past, a wave of extermination breaks the impetus of civilization and forces mankind to recommence its work.

No, civilization does not do away with suffering.

It heals, I grant, some wounds, physical, moral, and social. But it causes others just as painful, just as difficult to cure. And when, finally, one weighs all arguments pro and con, the most favorable judgment that one can pass seems to be this: for mankind on earth, in spite of all progress, the sum-total of suffering remains unchanged.

Let us assume, as a necessary supposition, that progress is defined. If it does not do away with suffering or death, then that which remains—the promises of known or unknown happiness flashed before our eyes—cannot satisfy us, for they do not quench, but rather intensify, our regrets and add to our anguish.

Thus none of the hypotheses offered to find an answer to the craving of man's heart for a permanent and perfect happiness in this world, is admissible, but the problem remains unsolved because the craving persists after those vain attempts at filling it.

Why hesitate any longer to pronounce the pacifying and saving word?

The craving for happiness which makes of us here below unfinished, incomplete, tortured beings, is neither the result of our temporal disappointments, nor the claim of a finite or "indefinite" earthly progress, and hence its orientation must be looked for outside and above this earth. Following with our eyes the horizon to which it points, we reach shores where the inconsistency of worldly things vanishes, where the possession of good things is no longer subject to a deceitful mobility, where man needs no longer fear suffering or death. As a substitute for this long list of negative propositions, let us offer a positive definition: Heaven is a supraterrestrial dwelling or state where immortal man enjoys permanent happiness: it is thither that this deep, unquenchable craving of ours tends.

But you may say: Why not accept with resignation the fate of having been purposely created to represent in the Universe the unfinished and incomplete stage of being? Such resignation is impossible. For above you there is an infinitely wise being, who would be the responsible author of this monstrous creation: a nature ordained towards a goal that it does not and never can attain. God does not commit such blunders—I almost said such crimes. And if perchance you hesitate to place your destiny into the hands of an all-wise Creator, remember the conclusion of our lecture on religions: Experience proves that no craving of our nature is ever frustrated. An object for it exists, and its realization is always possible. The two answers are but one: for this craving of our nature is the work of the Creator. Craving for happiness, disentangled from its earthly orientations, has but one issue: life after death and immortality.

IV

THE TESTIMONY OF "METAPSYCHICS"

MAN'S destiny is ingrained in his nature. It can be detected, first, by analysing his religious sentiments or needs. For here the craving for another "world" most strikingly reveals itself.

Still, we may go farther and broaden the field of investigation by considering not merely one of the psychological activities of our race, but the *ensemble* of those activities, that is, man as a whole.

From this still more comprehensive point of view the answer remains the same.

Man as a whole is an incomplete being. The ideal for which, clearly or obscurely, he believes himself born, cannot be realized on earth. That he desires and craves for more, that, unconsciously at times, he aims at the absolute, is due to the fact that he is bound to pursue and to finish beyond the grave the evolution which he began here on earth, whether he reaches it by successive stages or—such is the true and authentic teaching of Christianity—attains at once the consummation of his destiny.

In either case life after death appears as an ineluctable postulate.

Later on we will sum up this analysis of the human being and, I hope, establish on a still more solid basis the result of our first inductions. In the meantime I should like to open a broad parenthesis, and call your attention to a whole category of phenomena which have been much discussed of late; I mean those called "metapsychical."

The term is new, but the thing is very old. You will realize at once what I mean if I give you a list of more familiar names which all come under the generic term of metapsychics: turning tables, talking tablets, actions without contact, transfer of objects, television, prevision, apparitions, materializations, etc. Everyone is more or less familiar with these phenomena. As to the name of "metapsychics," in spite of its forbidding aspect, it is not incorrectly coined. First of all, it offers a probably intentional resemblance to a much older word which comes down to us from Aristotle—"metaphysics." Was the new name meant to insinuate that "metapsychics" has a relationship with psychology analogous to the one existing between metaphysics and physics? This would be a bold claim. Physics is concerned with the study of secondary causes from which proceed the phenomena of nature. Metaphysics, on the other hand, deals with the ultimate causes of things.

Do the bizarre manifestations enumerated above claim to reveal the ultimate secret of human psychology? This would be to go too far and to solidify with a threatening apriorism an eminently unstable ground. But perhaps what is meant is more simply—and modestly—to point out that the study of "supranormal" phenomena comes after (such is the meaning of the Greek preposition *meta*) that of the phenomena of normal or common psychology. Aristotle would not have opposed this scrupulous care for order and clearness.

But since the great majority of even the learned are not conversant with the subtleties of the Greek language, it is to be feared that men generally will interpret the word "metapsychics" in the transcendent meaning which the word "metaphysics" has received in the course of ages. This would be an equivocation fertile of prejudice.

What interests us most in the choice of this word is that it seems to betray above all a firm decision to remove from the state of chaos and confusion, where it seemed to be forever entangled, the study of the phenomena of supranormal psychology and to make them the object of a truly and strictly scientific research. And that is why I do not hesitate to introduce you to metapsychics.

Mark well, however, that the ideas to be mentioned are presented as purely hypothetical. The only real question, to which I intend to give an answer, is this: Supposing that metapsychics succeeds some day in becoming organized—as it aims to be—into a science properly so-called, with full possession of its objects and methods, could it possibly testify in favor of life after death and the immortality of the soul? Formulated in such terms, the question falls within our province and is interesting enough in itself to make unnecessary any reference to the more or less incredible stories by which the curiosity of any audience can be easily aroused.

We do not intend to appeal to morbid curiosity, but to perform a work of sincerity and good sense.

I

There seem to be three attitudes towards metapsychics at the present time.

The first is that of denial. Some purely and simply deny the alleged phenomena.

That a table starts to revolve or, by a series of distinct raps, expresses intelligible words; that a so-called medium, by his or her mere presence, causes the displacement of objects or the flashing of mysterious glimmers; that a person becomes suddenly aware, by presentiment, or vision, or an inner voice, of a misfortune, an accident, illness, or death affecting a relative or friend a thousand miles away—all these assertions, instead of being taken seriously, are bluntly denied. Cases of telepathy, such as frequently occur, strange coincidences in which chance seems to be mostly or even exclusively at work, apparitions of "spooks," living or dead, are declared to be the subjective creations of a morbid and nervous temperament. Accounts of séances, even when attested by honest and trustworthy witnesses, are labelled collective hallucinations or naïve manifestations of a clever faker, which could easily be accounted for by sleight of hand. Nothing can stand before the criticism of those severe judges. Their decision is based on prejudice. "These things are simply impossible," they say, and refuse to listen to the incredible stories which fill the columns of reviews and magazines dealing with "Occultism."

Not all assume this quiet attitude of indifference. Some seek first-hand information. But they return more obstinate than ever in their unbelief. They report that they saw nothing. On the other hand, their inquiry enables them to verify some rather disturbing facts, *e. g.*, the incurable propensity of mediums to deceive; the deceptive conditions under which experiments are conducted; the insufficiency of verification; the facility with which subjects and experimenters deceive each other, etc. In a word, the ground on which they set foot gives them the impression of a quagmire and a trap.

They are confirmed in their conviction by the result of the inquiry made before such a learned tribunal as the Paris Sorbonne. Mediums chosen from among the most renowned of their profession were tested three times by eminent and conscientious professors, and three times, alas! the verdict was unfavorable. The "subjects" either effected nothing, or, according to their habit, imprudently "helped" the experiment. An empirical and desolating law seemed to result from this examination conducted with real impartiality, namely, that the number and the quality of phenomena produced by mediums were in inverse proportion to the strictness of the supervision. When no supervision is exercised over them, phenomena are plentiful and extremely impressive. Under strict supervision, they disappear. That settles the case of "metapsychics" in the eyes of this group of thinkers.

At the opposite extreme of these sceptics is a group of ardent, earnest, and at times even fanatical believers, who are not satisfied with accepting the reality of the phenomena, but draw from them certain rigorous and irreformable conclusions. Those are the Spiritists. The more they study the problem, the more certain and self-evident it seems to them that the only way to explain the numerous cases of supranormal psychology, is by the intervention of disembodied spirits. It is the dead who move the tables and compel them to spell out messages from another world, or cause the docile planchette to register strange communications. It is the disembodied spirits who, like certain insects described by Fabre, strike our arms with ataxia, seize our hands, and, against our will, transform them into styluses obedient to astral dictates. These spirits borrow from the medium's substance the famous "ectoplasm," that indispensable raiment of their fleeting materializations, and it is they who, with countless ingenious expedients, often inspired by praiseworthy and disinterested purposes, confer upon mankind a boon which it would never have had except for their initiative, namely, the experimental, concrete, visible, audible, and tangible revelation of an after-life and the conditions of that life.

Owing to this revelation, as well as to the particular missions which the dead fulfil towards the living, Spiritism assumes the character of a religion. In our refined and sceptic age, it is the religion of spirits, of ghosts.

It is hard to refrain from emotion at the sight of so touching a persuasion. Like restless and ambitious minorities, the Spiritists are sensitive, and we must beware of hurting them with indiscreet objections. They might be a little more serene and use a little more conventional language. But it is difficult for them to imagine that other people cannot see what they themselves have seen, and their sensitiveness to our scepticism is, perhaps, merely the froth of a magnificent and misunderstood zeal.

Finally, halfway between the sceptics and the Spiritists is a third group, more complex and less clearly defined than the first two. It is made up of all those who, in these delicate and burning questions, try to keep their mental balance and avoid extremes.

As regards the "facts," they are careful to go into minute details, in order to settle the question, not whether the pretended phenomena, abstractly conceived, are unlikely, but simply whether they are real. In the case of verified phenomena, the Spiritistic interpretation, namely, that they are attributable to the intervention of the dead, does not appeal to these critics, though they do not deny it *a priori.* This would be too simple. They attribute the phenomena to the activity of the living rather than to the spirits of the dead. Guided and, as it were, introduced by the studies of psychiatrists, they investigate the human soul and discover "powers" unknown before our time,—powers whose atrocious names remind us of the cabalistic language of sorcerers: subliminal consciousness, cryptomnesis, cryptesthesia, etc. They do not, however, pretend to be able to account for all the mediumistic experiments with these imperfectly known "powers." They only congratulate themselves for having opened up a way on which subsequent investigators can proceed with security.

Recourse to the dead they regard as the legendary and heroic phase of a science unconscious of itself, of its resources, and of its future. Recourse to supranormal "powers" or "faculties" in the human soul inaugurates a new phase of scientific research, outlines a new chapter in psychology—a chapter in which the slow psychologists of "official" science will sooner or later have to coöperate.

Middle parties generally incur blows from both sides. Our metapsychists—as they call themselves—have not escaped this fate. The obstinate "sceptics" call them uncritical tyros in experimentation, pedantic theorists, who dream they are doing scientific work, while they are simply victims of their own incurable gullibility; and, worst of all, denounce them as hypocritical and camouflaged Spiritists. On the other hand, they are treated with no greater gentleness by the Spiritists. Naturally, for nobody likes to be considered an antediluvian ancestor of a science just born. It is unpleasant to feel that the benefit of a belief by which one dreamed the world would be transformed, is fading away and disappearing. The Spiritists have no more bitter enemies than the metapsychists, whose triumph would spell their ruination. They do not, however, seem greatly impressed by this dangerous competition. In their robust confidence in the justice of their cause they easily persuade themselves that, once the reality of mediumistic phenomena is admitted, sooner or later it will have to be explained by the intervention of the dead. The condescension of metapsychists toward Spiritists is reciprocal. But condescension does not necessarily mean cordial agreement and unity of views.

To be perfectly just, we should add that certain representatives—not all—of the middle parties are not exempt from regrettable aprioristic assumptions. They profess materialism and deny the immortality of the soul, thus inviting reproach from the Spiritists, who accuse them of inventing their learned explanations with a view to avoid the conclusions flowing from an impartial study of the facts.

This accusation of materialism is rather liberally brandished by the disciples of Allan Kardec, who cast the same anathemas at Catholics, who were not at all likely to uphold errors so contrary to their most essential principles. And since Catholics are generally attacked also by Spiritists, it will not be superfluous, by way of completing this brief description, to define their attitude toward these burning questions.

Some Catholic writers maintain that the whole collection of so-called mediumistic phenomena is mere fancy and cannot stand any serious probing. Some are themselves "metapsychists," inclined to accept, to a certain extent, the explanations based on subconscious and kindred phenomena. But, in spite of their divergent opinions, all Catholics have a common ground, for all believe in the existence of a world of spirits and the effective intervention of those invisible beings in the affairs of earth.

Yet so different is their conviction from the doctrine of the Spiritists that there is an impassable chasm between the two groups. The Spiritists admit only "disembodied" spirits, souls disengaged from the bonds of flesh, but retain another and more subtle body, which they call astral. The horizon of Christian faith is much wider; for, besides souls disengaged from their bodies, it admits the existence of pure spirits, good or bad, angels of light or of darkness. Besides, the Catholic Church teaches that souls in their discarnate state no longer have any connection with matter, not even an astral body—a double, as it were, of the carnal body. And this is the reason why free communication between the dead and the living is reduced to a few exceptional cases. God alone, by a direct intervention of His almighty power, can grant to departed souls the privilege of manifesting themselves to the living. And *vice versa*, the living can communicate with the dead only if it pleases God to be the intermediary of those relations of which ordinarily prayer is the sole legitimate expression. And as it would be supremely injurious to the dignity of God to compromise His omnipotence with table-turning or mediumistic trances of hyperesthesia or ideoplastia, the hypothesis of the intervention of the dead is obviously excluded. The only question is whether the phenomena in question may not be purely and simply the work of evil spirits who are bent on deceiving and ruining men. Here, from the Catholic point of view, lies the key to the problem.

I do not speak, of course, of irreducible sceptics. Still it might not be amiss to inquire whether their negative attitude is not more or less consciously inspired by the secret desire to avoid or suppress a question which they regard as embarrassing and inopportune. But for those who certify the reality of the phenomena, the question cannot be dodged. Among those who hold various opinions in regard to it, are the Satanists, if I may call them thus, who refer everything to the devil. Then there are the moderates, who, while not denying the possibility of demonic intervention, try to ascertain, as was done in the case of hypnotism, whether the neighboring field of phenomena called "metapsychical" may not be, in its main lines, tributary to psychological causes, the sources of which are in human nature.

Such is, broadly outlined, the present state of the problem. It is rather involved, and perhaps this attempt at classification may not have done much good. Still, we had to sketch the lay of the land, first, to emphasize the fact that the ground is not so sure that there cannot be room for several opinions, and then to assign to the following considerations their just limits of probability.

We can see already what a delicate undertaking it will be to disentangle from this chaos a rational argument in favor of life after death. But let us try.

2

Of course, there is no room for such an argument if we wholly reject the genuineness of the phenomena which might supply an eventual basis. The position of those who absolutely deny all the facts seems to me untenable. One may invoke the deplorable facility with which even in the twentieth century credit is given to ancient tales replete with the crudest kind of prodigies. We have not yet forgotten some rather notorious hoaxing which, a few decades ago, deceived several of the most honest and enlightened students. It is a notorious fact that mediums are often caught cheating.

All this is true; but are not those who argue thus a living proof that, notwithstanding certain regrettable tendencies to gullibility, our age is unwilling to swallow nursery tales without criticism?

Gullibility is a fact. Criticism—even morbid criticism—is another fact. If it were not for criticism, neither the insatiable thirst for prodigies would have been denounced, nor the false mediums unmasked, nor their victims put to shame. And if criticism has subjected to the reaction of corrosive acids the suspicious collection of so-called "supranormal" phenomena, why should we not give to those who wield that criticism without dissimulation the credit of simply desiring to distinguish truth from falsehood?

Will they be reproached for lack of severity? Read again, for instance, the narrative of the circumstances that brought about the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research in the chief university center of England. Consider the method employed by its English members, and its foreign correspondents in France, America, and other countries, the patient research, the accumulation of evidence about the minutest facts, the rigorous methods of verification, the cautiousness of the conclusions drawn. If, after having minutely verified all the facts, you are still in doubt, you simply have to give up all hope of arriving at certitude concerning any historical fact whatever. History is often satisfied with less authentic testimonies than these.

Do not the labors of the International Metapsychical Institute also deserve the attention of the learned world? Disregarding the philosophical views which are brought forward to interpret the results of its positive experiments, if we consider those experiments in themselves and for their own sake, there is nothing to prove that the operators are less sincere or less competent than those at Cambridge or New York.

Attacks have been made, discussions have ensued; but no one need be blinded by the often excessive tone of journalistic discussion. The data are not confined to secret and inaccessible archives; anyone may study them and form his own opinion. In many cases you may deem it wiser to suspend your judgment, if you think the experiments have been performed unsatisfactorily, without a sufficiently strict supervision. In some others the conditions of the experiment are entirely above reproach. Why, then, hesitate and suspect a clever and wickedly concocted scheme against the truth?

But what about the experiments made at the Sorbonne? They were a failure, but to draw from this failure a general conclusion applicable to all other cases, past and future, would clearly be to go farther than the organizers of the experiments would care to go.

The failure rather tends to confirm what was already known, namely, that a medium is not to be handled like a spark plug. It is not enough to press the button to get a spark. It is not enough to start a fire to get a reaction. In this instance the psychological factor is of major importance. Around those eminently nervous and sensitive beings there needs to be an environment or atmosphere of confidence and abandonment, together with the most attentive and strict supervision. In this combination, as all specialists know, lies the greatest difficulty of the problem. Let the one or the other be too predominant, and the experiment will be a failure; even when both are harmoniously blended, failure often ensues, either because there is a lack of supervision, or because the medium obstinately ruins the experiment, for he is more or less unconsciously inclined to cheat in order to protect himself against the experimenters, who want to catch him in the act. An experiment of the kind requires not only good mediums, but also competent experimenters; and the latter are as rare as the former.

At any rate, the failure of the experiments at the Sorbonne does not at all impair the results of other experiments, conducted with equal impartiality and, perhaps, with a longer preparation and a deeper knowledge of the ground to be explored. These results cannot be rejected if the sciences based on observation are to retain their intrinsic character and value.

Are we, then, to accept Spiritism? Not at all, though to do so would greatly facilitate our task. Admit the reality of the phenomena and the correctness of Spiritistic interpretation, and you have in metapsychics a triumphal testimony in favor of life after death. But even if we might take such an easy path, it would be well to subdue our enthusiasm, for the Spiritist horizon is limited and very low.

Whither does Spiritism lead after leaving this sublunary world? Neither very far nor very high up. Man survives and remains terribly like himself in the world beyond. And besides, there is nothing to prove that this rather dull existence is a promise of immortality. The reason why we refuse to accept Spiritism is that from the mere experimental standpoint —the one which its followers take—there remains an unknown element which has never been explained and for which there is no explanation. Before jumping from this earthly to the astral plane, we must demand an answer to the question: What is a medium? What is this strange and enigmatic character? What are the limits of his or her capacity? To what extent can he or she exercise the strange aptitudes which he or she seems to have received for the express purpose of exciting and deceiving the curiosity of psychologists? Let us take a typical example.

The chief proof invoked by Spiritists in behalf of the supraterrestrial origin of the communications and messages received through mediums (by means of talking tables, ouija boards, automatic writing, materializations, etc.) is this: as the medium communicates knowledge that he or she does not possess, and which he or she could not draw from any earthly source, either from the audience or from his or her subliminal consciousness or the subliminal consciousness of others—this knowledge must have been imparted to the medium by some being from another world. This "proof" assumes a striking force when it adduces what in Spiritistic parlance are called "signs of identity." Some disembodied spirit comes before the audience and relates his own life, quotes precise dates, or gives minute details. Now the medium (individual or collective) is completely ignorant of those details; and still, when verification is made, they are fully confirmed. A few slight errors do not modify the general impression. The medium knew all those things. And who imparted this knowledge to him, if not the disembodied soul? Is it possible, in view of these facts, to question the reality of intercourse between the dead and the living?

Yes, we make bold to do so. And for this reason: Among the metapsychical phenomena, one of the strangest and most thoroughly studied is that of "metagnomia." Place into the hands of a "metagnomic" subject a given object—a piece of cloth, a handkerchief, a watch, etc.—which belonged to a certain person actually living and known to the subject in a vague way. The subject—provided he is in good condition, which is not always the case—will in a few moments reconstruct the moral character of the absent person and reveal some incidents of his life completely unknown to both the person and the experimenter.

To have recourse here to the subconscious mind would be absurd; for the latter supposes at least a previous cramming of notions the memory of which, though apparently lost, was in reality preserved, and suddenly ascends to the threshold of clear consciousness.

Now how does the medium, by means of an insignificant object, acquire an exact knowledge which he or she did not previously possess?

Shall we have recourse to the "psychometric" hypothesis, which supposes that the object is impregnated with memories, which the medium, through specially developed faculties, recovers? But this frail hypothesis does not explain the mystery. Is it certain that the object was with its owner always and everywhere? Quite often it can be proved that it was not. It even happens that the medium does not need the presence of this object; it is enough that he or she direct his or her thoughts towards the person in question.

There seems to be no other way to escape these difficulties than to attribute to the medium the strange faculty of tracing like a clever bloodhound the footsteps left in life by the person pointed out to him or her. Quickly and by a kind of instinct he or she retraces the thread of time, place, and circumstances; little by little the portrait is completed, being made up of all the idiosyncrasies revealed in the course of this rapid investigation.

It might be simpler to assume that all those features are read by the medium directly and from a distance in the subconscious memory of the living person. But this explanation would not be above reproach, for it often happens that the medium gathers items of information of which the absent person is not aware. It also happens—and this fact is not unimportant—that the medium loses the scent, as it were, or goes astray and introduces into his description features belonging to other persons. And all occurs as if his capriciously jumping thought were rambling into space and gathering information, maintained indeed in the same direction by the initial impulse, yet sufficiently free to skip and wander into side-paths.

Such are the curious phenomena which are now being studied with a great deal of perseverance and method by Dr. Osty, the present director of the International Institute of Metapsychics. This study is not a waste of time; for though this kind of research is fortunately less accessible to the superficial curiosity of a public eager for emotions and to the sensational newspapers, it is far more interesting, to our mind, than the much talked-of question of ectoplasm. It also has this additional advantage that it takes up again, on new foundations, the investigations conducted for almost forty years by the Society for Psychical Research, with a view to elucidate, if possible, the phenomena of telepathy.

But let us return to Spiritism and its crucial proof drawn from the signs of identity. Someone, supposedly a departed spirit, introduces himself to the audience, mentions his name and qualities, relates the events of his life, and even indicates the sources from which his assertions can be verified. Does not this last circumstance furnish the key to the problem? The person is dead, and everyone knows that in Spiritistic séances it is not generally the living that are conjured up. At times, however, mistakes occur. Thus it has happened more than once—and this puts us on the right track—that, to the amazement of the public, the person introducing himself as dead has been found, after verification, to be still living and in good health. The medium's "vision" is capricious at times.

However, such cases are rare. Let us suppose that the absent person is really dead and the medium is trying to take his cue from the world beyond. But, though that person is dead and his obscure existence is hidden from our gaze, he did not quit this world without leaving footprints behind; there are many vestiges of his journey through our midst. Those vestiges are imprinted wherever he lived, in material things, in private or official documents, in the conscious or subconscious memory of many who knew him, associated with him, loved or hated him.

Whoever journeys through this life, however obscure and humble his rôle, leaves more or less deeply marked traces behind. They are composed of countless relations, subtle connections with all the objects and all the brains which came in contact with him.

In vain did death remove him who was the center and the term of those many wires connecting him with the external world or with the world of souls. The center is empty, but the wires are unbroken and the mysterious waves still circulate and condense in countless unknown receptacles. And all this, we insist, goes on not in the world beyond, but on this earth. By the usual means of knowledge at our disposal, we could, after the manner of "historians," reconstruct at least some fleeting traits of any given person who has disappeared from the vortex of this life as a fly disappears from a swarm of fellow-flies. This difficult and perhaps impossible task is precisely the one attempted by Spiritists when they investigate the official records of city halls, hospitals, asylums, or interrogate the deceased person's neighbors.

But why such strange inquiries? Because the Spiritist's singular mental mechanism started even before he had any idea of the path he was to tread. This path he, the detector of human waves, trod first. He first made the inquiry and conducted it with his own means and methods. As a bloodhound starting on the trace of the departed, he was not long, if I may say so, before discovering his prey. He traveled with it, questioning material objects, documents, the clear consciousness as well as the obscure subconsciousness of men. He drew the deceased person's portrait. But what he brings to his wondering audience is not a departed soul, a ghost escaped or torn from the silence of the other world, but the earthly traces of a living person. And his process of investigation does not substantially differ from the one used by "metagnomes."

I do not expect non-Spiritists, and still less Spiritists, to accept this "explanation" of mine without questioning. But I wanted to explain why—aside from other reasons for doubt, by merely taking into account the results of experiments which overrun the field of Spiritism—the latter's crucial argument, drawn from the signs of identity, does not convince me.

We are dealing with an enigmatic, elusive being, of whom we cannot affirm that his aptitudes are not limited to the world of the living. We thought we could read in his eyes the sublime light of the other world. The charm is broken. Our eyes are looking to earth, even when, like Helen Smith's, they claim to be filled with visions of Mars.

3

We are neither sceptics nor Spiritists. Shall we, then, come to no solution? We stick to our "phenomena” and have not, it seems, advanced a single step towards the solution of our problem. Perhaps light may come by dint of further search. Upon this field, where hypotheses thrive in the soft soil, a solid block seems to be more or less sharply outlined.

Would not true, authentic, verified mediumism open a rather interesting vista? Let us avoid big words, such as “faculties” or “powers,” apt to confer upon the source of supranormal facts a character of permanency, habit, and universality, which they may not possess.

We might be tempted to pick up a stock of extremely precious qualities. We must not forget that at times the *nouveaux riches* entertain illusions as to the magnitude of their recently acquired wealth; and let us be modest as it behooves us. Some will try to convince us that every man possesses in germ the marvelous gift of mediumism. Many would not care much for that; some would regard it with fear and invincible repugnance. Indeed we do not know whether the mediums are precursors of a new stage in the evolution of the future, and—thank God!—these prophets of a new epoch are rare, exceptional, and not always sympathetic.

Keeping these reservations in mind, we willingly grant that the realized and verified facts are not without significance. It is no ordinary feat for a man to decipher a manuscript or a picture through an opaque body, to read another person's thought, to reconstruct from a distance the characteristics of an unknown person or an unexpected event. In fact, it is so extraordinary that some minds, infected with materialism, but candid withal, have given way in face of such evidence and yielded to Spiritism. They deemed it impossible to explain such manifestations by the sole action of material forces. There must be, there is, in man a source of transcendent energy, capable of being freed from the laws of nature under certain circumstances. And, since this energy is transcendent, it is not bound up with matter, but survives the disintegration of matter—in other words, it is immortal.

This reasoning is not entirely futile. Later on we shall see that, even to give it its full meaning and its rational value, we need not base it on the curious and rare manifestations which are the object of metapsychics.

Have we then reached our goal? Far from it: the problem is even more complex, and in the interests of the cause which we defend we must exercise the utmost prudence and severity in dealing with it.

Thus there would be in us "eyes" which can see farther than our eyes of flesh, "organs" superior in acuteness and bearing to our ordinary and normal organs. This is a bold metaphor, for Science cannot indicate the location and nature and exceptional character of those "eyes" and "organs." But this is not the point at issue. What we want to know is, whether those marvelous mediumistic aptitudes, those eyes, those organs, are not, like normal organs, limited by the boundaries of sense perception or the power of the imagination, and whether they are not, as bodily organs, destroyed by death. I do not raise this question for the sake of being contrary. Is it not a fact—admitted by metapsychists—that mediumistic capacities are intimately dependent on the physical condition of the medium?

For everything that concerns mediumism, it is hard to lay down a rigorous law; but despite its capacities, there are laws in that domain which do not favor the claims of the Spiritists. In most cases this aptitude is opposed, weakened, or totally destroyed by defective physiological conditions. A cold, a slight fever, overwork—and this power is gone. Morale also reacts on it. Cares, disappointments, preoccupations, anything can shake or quench it. At times, the reverse is true: some mediums are never more active than when oppressed by physical suffering. Good health is almost a hindrance to them; if they are too well, their work is poor. Furthermore, this gift does not always stay with its owner through life. In many cases it appears suddenly and disappears in the same way. Its duration is not subject to any general law; it may last one day or many years. But old age is an insurmountable barrier to its permanency: it not only weakens, but suppresses it. The professional career of a medium is of short duration. Its death knell is sounded by a perceptible loss of supranormal activity, and everything seems to indicate that its focus has been quenched for a long time when Death knocks at the door.

And this is regrettable. Caprices and partial eclipses of this interesting aptitude would be gladly accepted if, at the supreme moment, when the human being is disintegrated, the mediumistic gift would cast a superb flame and proclaim its triumph over material forces, thus reduced to complete powerlessness. Then only would we have discovered the solution that we had vainly sought and we would owe to metapsychics an experimental contribution to the question of life after death.

But why dream of the impossible? When death comes, the existence of supranormal powers has reached an end after having oscillated in a capricious succession of ups and downs throughout life.

I promised to tell no ghost stories. I will make one exception, however, in order to illustrate by a real case the conclusion which we are about to reach. It is taken almost at random from hundreds of such cases verified, authenticated, and classified.

The subject of this experience * was Mr. James Wilson, formerly principal of Clifton College, England, and a well-known mathematician. The incident I am about to relate happened towards the end of his second year at Cambridge University. He had been in perfect health, took regular part in rowing, football, and other outdoor sports, and was not at all subject to morbid hallucinations. But one evening he felt unwell and began to tremble, although at the time he did not judge that he was ill. He became frightened and was quite unable to overcome his feeling of distress. In vain he tried to occupy his mind with methematical problems. Feeling that he was going to die, he went downstairs to the room of his friend, a Mr. Mullens. Upon seeing Wilson, and before the latter had spoken a word, Mullens uttered a cry of alarm. The two friends sat by the fire for a

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* **Hallucinations Telepathiques, pp. 88 ff.**

while and then called upon another friend. Wilson continued to experience a strange uneasiness, without any specific symptoms, but with mental distress and the assurance that he was going to die that night.

About three hours later, he felt better, returned to his room, went to bed, and soon fell asleep. The next morning he felt entirely well. In the afternoon he received a letter informing him that his twin brother had died the evening before in Lincolnshire. The thought of his brother had not occurred to him even once the evening before. The brother had been tubercular for a long time past, but James Wilson had had no news of him for several days, and no reason to suspect that his death was so near at hand. The news was a complete surprise.

Such are the facts. Their analysis suggests, without any possible doubt, that James Wilson had a passive rôle in that feeling of uneasiness, warning him about a death happening to one near and dear to him in a distant place. He did not know at the time where his brother was. He did not think of him. He had not the slightest idea or suspicion of his brother's imminent death. He was suddenly overwhelmed by a powerful emotion, but even under its spell he did not think of his sick brother. The interpretation he himself gave to this phenomenon was wrong. It was not a harbinger of his own death. In other words, Wilson was not an "agent," but a "recipient." He was moved, and in a manner possessed, monopolized by another's action. That other was the dying man; and through him the student at Cambridge experienced the pangs of agony. Hence his conviction that he himself was about to die. He said that he never experienced such a nervous depression before. It was a kind of panic which took hold of him. He shuddered as at the approach of death.

Thus two beings, separated by a long distance, agonize together, and in such a way that one agonizes through the powerful and mysterious influence of the other.

A strange detail which does not make the case less interesting is that the pangs did not exactly coincide in point of time with the twin-brother's death. James states that his brother died about four hours before he himself felt this painful impression. To try to account for this delay would be useless. At least it shows that the theories on supranormal phenomena are not as absurd as the Spiritists represent them to be when they speak of "delayed telepathy." The feeling experienced by the brother is rigorously patterned on that experienced by the man really in agony. It is the shadow, the replica, the prolongation of the former; but it is produced only after a certain lapse of time. In order to attain its distant effect, it may have had obstacles to overcome, perhaps in the consciousness of the recipient, poorly prepared to perceive it. If this were so, the vigor of the transmitted energy and of its original source would appear still more evident, since nothing resisted the waves which it caused, not even the absence, inattention, and security of the one affected by them.

Let us go back to the source. What is it? The weakness, the physical exhaustion of a man dying of consumption? At the very moment when this far-away brother foundered little by little into the darkness of unconsciousness, when his eyes had ceased to see and his ears to hear, when the beating of his heart grew slower and the brain became foggy, when the *rigor mortis* inexorably seized limb after limb—at that moment, when the frail partition separating death from the tomb was about to fall, there emanated from that dying man an intense, imperious, irresistible energy, which went miles to upset a human being who had no idea of death being so near.

Is not this contrast very striking? Can it be that this poor body, the disintegration of which has already begun, that those organs which life is abandoning, could work such a miracle of vitality?

Would it not, on the contrary, seem that the ruin of the physical being—just as the dried shell breaks so that the ripened fruit may fall—has delivered "another" being, which laughs at death and, before plunging into the depths—impenetrable for us—of the other world, on the threshold of the grave, challenges our anguish of surviving by a cry of liberty?

Can we draw a definitive general principle from this analysis? No. The field for investigation remains open, and my only intention was to show that it is still open to impartial scientific research.

On condition that the investigation of phenomena be made without a fixed resolution of brutally denying them, it is possible, without accepting Spiritism, to make due allowance for these metapsychical facts in the philosophical study of the problem of life after death and immortality.

Taken by itself, of course, this argument will never be absolutely conclusive; for metapsychics alone cannot explain the nature of the force or source of the energy that it exploits. But it can add to the many other proofs of the same kind a serious and worth-while probability.

However, we must leave it to the specialists to clarify the subject. I firmly believe that no greater harm could befall metapsychics than to be relegated to the background of lame and ridiculous experimentation by incompetent persons (passive attendants of séances, feverish consultors of tables and seers, etc.) who often pay for their imprudence with physical as well as mental disorders; this is another reason why they should refrain from such practices. The Catholic Church is eminently right in forbidding all such practices.

V

THE TESTIMONY OF CONSCIENCE

After this excursion into the world of so-called "metapsychical" phenomena, which, we hope, will not have proved useless, we shall now resume the analysis of man in his ordinary or normal state. The normal man furnishes a new and valuable testimony in favor of life after death and Immortality. Fundamentally, this testimony does not differ from that derived from the unfinished state of earthly life, but it offers an aspect characteristic enough to justify a special study.

Man, as we have said before, desires and craves for more than this earthly life can give him. This surplus of craving over reality, in the conditions in which it exists, becomes an impenetrable mystery if it does not, some time or other, lead to the conquest and possession of a definitive and perfect happiness.

But since there can be no such happiness in this world, mankind, by the extent and intensity of its craving, testifies that this present life does not fulfil its destiny.

We will present the same problem in a sharper and more acute form.

The craving of the human soul for a stable and perfect happiness is admittedly very deep and strong, though, as a matter of fact, perhaps less violent than that other instinct which serves and protects it, as the knights of old used to serve and protect the weak, namely, the instinct of justice. The difference is easily perceived. No long experience is needed to convince anyone that perfect happiness is not to be found here below. Happiness is chiefly an object of hope. We desire it, we crave for it, but feel that it is far off, and however hard this may be, we are resigned not to possess it right away. Justice, on the contrary, seems to be nearer to us; it is the keystone of the social edifice and the cement of human relations. What is more natural, then, than to demand and obtain it without delay? Should it happen that we are frustrated in this attempt, it is not at all resignation or the melancholy of unfulfilled desires that we feel. Our shock-powers, irascible passions, ardent and tenacious claims energize immediately. The heart melts when it dreams of happiness: it leaps like a lion when justice is wounded.

And since, in is widest meaning, justice is *par excellence* the field of moral conscience—from a higher point of view all the dictates of conscience aim at establishing the reign of justice by giving to God, to our fellowmen, and to ourselves what is due to each—and since justice, taken in the strictest sense, is under the jurisdiction of the tribunal of conscience, I do not hesitate to place this lecture, which deals mostly with justice, under the ægis of conscience.

In what does the testimony of conscience consist? Here it is in a few words: Full and adequate justice does not and cannot belong to this world, any more than definitive and perfect happiness.

I

Man is a social being. To live with his fellowmen is for him a necessity. Left to his individual resources, he is reduced to impotence. His aptitudes, his capacities for progress are boundless, but they can develop and expand only by being pooled with the coördinate efforts of other men.

Society, with its mechanism and its laws, with the authority which directs and the hierarchy which frames it, is for mankind not only a condition of progress, but, still more fundamentally, a condition of life or death. Fancy, for instance, that the fundamental cell of every social organism, *e. g.*, the family, would be destroyed and that children would be abandoned by their parents after birth: in that case the human race would be doomed to destruction.

Why insist? A common-sense truth needs no demonstration. In spite of Jean Jacques Rousseau, man remains convinced that, deprived of the help of his fellowmen, he is but a straw tossed about and swept away by the wind.

Now social life entails an unavoidable consequence. In order that society may live, its members must not be equal. In other words, inequality is the supreme law of social life. Without it no hierarchy is possible. Not every man can be president nor can every man be a subordinate.

The very existence of society requires diversity and, consequently, inequality of aptitudes. If all men devoted their lives to metaphysical speculation, we should all starve. If, on the other hand, there were only narrow minds, without power of genius, mankind would, for lack of directive ideas, be doomed to perpetual stagnation.

Inequality of aptitudes allows society to spread its sphere of influence indefinitely. It justifies a division of labor, specialization of trades, and an almost limitless perfectioning of professional competence.

From the statesman whose function it is to govern, to the street-cleaner whose task is to contribute to public health, every man has a place marked out for him. Magistrates, business men, professors, writers, artists, laborers, whether they supply brain or brawn, are organs of society, each one applied to a determined task. And the more numerous these organs are, the more they are attached to their functions and directed towards their end by some higher intelligence, the more solid and prosperous will society be.

But inequality of aptitudes leads to other kinds of equally necessary differences among the members of society: inequality of learning, of station, of profits, of fortunes. In the various professions or trades inequality is still more unavoidable and no less beneficial. The more gifted and energetic make up for the relative incapacity and slowness of others. They invite emulation and keep up competition. Now it is natural that those who work hardest should get the biggest reward. The ablest man, provided he works conscientiously, as a rule succeeds better than he whose capacity is more limited or whose love for work is weaker. Therefore, inequality is both the basis and the apex of the social edifice. *Dura lex, sed lex.*

Now, I ask, is all this just? A queer and dangerously paradoxical question! Yes indeed, it *is* just.

And why not? Facts are stubborn things. Now, inequality is a fact, and one which, from the human point of view, appears as a beneficent necessity. It is in the very nature of things. It is a primary datum of everyday experience.

You ask: "Yes, man is bound by his nature to live in society; is this destination just or unjust?"

A "nature" is just when it realizes the characteristic notes of its essence. On the other hand, inequality is not *a* means, but *the* means by which society subsists: therefore it must be just, because it is in conformity with the exigencies of the nature by which it exists. All this is very clear and contains no mystery. Yet we may well ask the question: Is social inequality in conformity with absolute justice?

Before proceeding farther, it will not be amiss to answer another question intimately connected with the preceding: Is society itself an end or merely a means to an end?

It is an end if it really constitutes the definitive term and goal to which mankind tends by all the powers of its being and in such a way that, human society once constituted, there is nothing more perfect to be looked for. If this is the case, we cannot offer the slightest objection. Inequality then partakes of the immobility of the goal. It is an ultimate and definitive term. And it is that which men seek and crave for, when they join their efforts together.

To defend such a thesis would be to uphold the monstrous vagaries of State Socialism, which proceeds on the theory that human individuals are not full-fledged members and co-laborers, but the property of society.

This theory is false, for many reasons, particularly for this reason, that the human personality is an indefeasible good which no power can appropriate by force. In vain do you array before us the State's formidable machinery for crushing initiatives and substituting its brutal will for the free will of its citizens: it is a fact that society is a work of liberty, a spontaneous subjecting of individual energies to the dictates of duty, which is moral rather than social.

It follows that society is not an end, but a means. It is the means or the *ensemble* of means by which men, conscious of their individual weaknesses, associate together to secure for one and all the largest possible measure of human development.

Men associate; they are in duty bound to do so, because association is for them a law of nature. But by associating, they do not melt as salt in the ocean.

Each one remains a man. And though the capital is common, the interests are diverse.

We have now arrived at the core of the problem. But are we not moving in a circle? Society joins men together to secure for each the largest possible development; but as soon as they are assembled, she says to them: "Anyway, you will never be served equally, because, as human society, I can live and subsist only by your inequalities." Do you call that just, absolutely just?

"Why not?" you may ask. "This inequality by which society lives, but which it did not create, and which therefore is prior to it, creates for it, on principle, one and only one obligation, namely, to give to each one according to his needs, his capacity, his merits. This is the very law of distributive justice, and distributive justice surely is justice."

Granted. Distributive justice takes men just as they are and treats them accordingly. But you must grant that Justice begins her work only after certain problems, which she ignores and with which she is not concerned, have been solved. A subordinate science, you know, needs not discuss the principles on which it rests.

What are those problems? This one, for instance: Men are born unequal. What reason regulates the distribution of abilities and aptitudes? What mysterious power presides over births through time and space? Without accepting the false and discouraging principles of determinism, we may acknowledge that birth, environment, happy or unhappy tendencies of character, etc., do have a certain weight in determining man's earthly fate.

Why is one born rich whilst another is destined to feel the pinch of poverty? Why is one endowed with an intellect which renders possible a high career, whilst another, with moderate gifts, can only aspire to inferior positions? Why, in a word, out of the vast sheaf of succeeding generations which come up ceaselessly from the depths of life, did our own pierce the earthly crust at this particular point rather than at any other?

Society and distributive justice may assign to each one his part according to his ability and reward him according to his merits. She neither does nor can know why, on the chess-board of life, the human figures hold this position rather than some other at the outset of the game. For there is no reason why such and such a man should be found here rather than elsewhere. Society does her best with the distribution thus made, but she cannot explain it.

To have recourse to heredity, atavism, or analogous factors, would merely be to evade the question, not to solve it. Perhaps it would only make it more obscure, for, from the moral standpoint, the sins and virtues of our fathers, their qualities and vices, their successes or failures, could not create any right or responsibility for their children.

Besides, by going up from link to link, along the series of relative and superficial phenomena, one finally stumbles against this eternal truth, that human nature is absolutely equal in all the individuals who share in it.

Man's nature cannot be diminished or divided. To tamper with it would be to destroy it. A man is a man or he is nothing. And what is true of our nature, is true also of our chief faculties. The intelligence and the will *per se* are not capable of being either minimized or aggrandized. Every intellect is turned towards the truth, and every will is orientated towards good. The fundamental identity of human nature entails the fundamental equality of all men. On this plane inequality disappears, and all men are equal as to aptitudes and rights, notwithstanding the practical necessities of social order.

Sadly confounding these two very distinct points of view, the men of the French Revolution (1789) sowed trouble and disorder and prepared for France and for Europe a long series of painful jolts from which they are still suffering. They mixed and jumbled two aspects which earthly life is unable to reconcile. They identified the temporal with the eternal man and unwisely transferred to the latter the rights of the former.

Christianity, whose teaching these rationalists disfigured without understanding it, was wiser and more enlightened. It imposed upon every man the obligation of faithfully and uncomplainingly occupying his providential place in society, and at the same time proclaimed the equality of all men before God, who is the only one to pass definitive judgment on every man's true merits.

The Revolution confused these two planes. Hence that rage for equality, that jealous hatred of superiorities and abilities, as well as the dangerous mania for majority rule. And if after a century and a half of such experimenting our society still survives, we may be sure it is not because it adopted this error, but rather because it succeeded, little by little, in getting rid of it.

It is assuredly good for individuals and for the social order that society facilitates a sufficiently free circulation of its members as well as a sufficiently flexible framework to enable everyone to reach the rank due to his worth and to render the services he is fit to render. But if society proclaimed absolute equality for all its members, it would by this act of folly sign its own death-warrant. Fortunately, nature is stronger than conventionalities and abstract fictions. It calmly follows its course, and when it happens to deviate from its normal direction, it must return, not without suffering, to the right path.

Even if it had no other advantage, this sad conflict would lead us to suspect that man might very well crave for a superior justice of which the present world offers him but a mutilated and incomplete image.

But let us not jump to conclusions, but patiently continue our investigation.

2

Up to this point we have argued in the abstract, as if human society always fulfilled its mission, which is to render to everyone the justice to which he has a right according to his needs, aptitudes, and merits. Even if society would always fulfil this mission, the problem stated at the beginning of this lecture would not be solved; we have just seen the reason why. But what should we conclude when cold realities make us see society powerless to cause even this partial and relative justice to reign; nay, worse than that, when we perceive the limits which circumscribe its field of action and release its responsibility?

Is it true, then, that on earth every man occupies a place corresponding to his qualities and merits? It is a very delicate question. Dissatisfaction, bitterness, and complaints do not make a demonstrative proof. Self-esteem is boundless, and one easily imagines oneself called to take the place of more talented and richer people. However, let us do away with exaggerated pride, insatiable ambitions, and over-sensitive self-love, and try to form an impartial judgment. In many cases we shall find either a considerable deficit or a pronounced excess.

Is success the usual prerogative of talent and virtue? No. Scandalous success is often due to such doubtful factors as intrigue, servile flexibility, a clever combination of unscrupulous audacity and unctuous platitude. All superstition aside, would it not seem that some people are doomed to failure? The ancients represented Fortune as a woman slipping blind-folded down an unstable wheel. The simile may be old and antiquated, but it is as true to-day as it was in the time of the Greeks.

And, pray, what can Society do? Are you going to oblige her to discern infallibly true virtue from false, to unmask all schemers and bridle the caprices of Fortune by laws? Social sagacity and authority do not go that far. Society can promote institutions to encourage virtue; she can punish crimes which threaten the public order; but there is a field which she cannot reach—the domain of conscience, where human acts assume their true appearance, and where at times pretended virtue is exposed as abominable hypocrisy. Human justice is powerless before the walled door of secret intentions. And who would dare to pretend that the moral value of an act does not depend, first and above all, on the good or bad thought from which it emanates?

Shall I go farther? I will, for there are injustices of which society is the occasional cause, but for which it cannot be held responsible. Millions of soldiers fell in the World War, for instance; can we say they had less right to life than the survivors? To affirm it would be blasphemy. Were they less fit to serve society? Their heroism proves the contrary. How much talent and virtue was thus cut off in the prime of life! How many minds which could have radiated intellectual light! How many wills that could have electrified and drawn thousands to virtue! But they are dead, and society lost in them a prodigious treasure of resources and hopes. Nor can the most religiously preserved memory change the fate of those who are gone. And even this remembrance is not universally faithful in the minds of the living. See what happened since the World War. Never perhaps was the human race given to such a craze for pleasure; men and women forget that they are dancing on the graves of hundreds of thousands of heroes. Compare the economic and social consequences of the war with the gigantic efforts made by our soldiers, and you will be oppressed by a sense of bitterness. Is it for this that they shed their blood? The victory which their iron hands captured is like a wounded bird—its wings trail in the ruts of international avarice and in the morass of revolutionary upheavals.

And what do we find at the source of this chain of causes and effects? A sin? Yes, a sin of Society *qua* aggressor. But that millions of human lives be sacrificed to the necessary task, that in order to resist the attack, such an immense throng of choice young men, whose welfare Society is called upon to procure both by nature and by vocation, had to be crushed, destroyed, annihilated, transcends the horizon and the viewpoint of earthly justice and calls for a compensation that no collectivity was or ever will be able to supply.

I have chosen this example because, on account of its magnitude, it allows us to descry as through a magnifying glass the enigma which the justice of this world offers to our conscience. But does not the same problem, though on a smaller scale, come up every moment under your puzzled eyes? Why these stupid accidents which, in one second, quench the flame of genius or the sweet irradiation of virtue? A man has worked for twenty years in order to endow the world with marvelous discoveries. In the full maturity of his wonderful mind he is run over and killed by an automobile. His name is Pierre Cury, and his disparition, from an earthly point of view, is a challenge to common sense. A young woman endowed with tenderness, virtue, and beauty, the centre of a happy home, is about to become a mother, and her heart throbs with radiant hope. She dies in giving birth to her child, and the little one will never know a mother's care and love. Why does it so often happen that a generous soul dwells in a weak body, whilst robust health is the privilege of a useless cad?

Why? Why? The earth is full of these "why's." They spring up, as boiling geysers in Yellowstone Park beneath the feet of travelers. And no power, not even the collective power of society, is able to furnish an answer. Still, if there could be in this world an influence active enough to prevent and stop the painful surprises of fate, would it not be that which results from the concentration of numberless wills?

Society works, or at least its primary duty is to work, for an ideal of justice. But the results of this labor are very limited.

There is a justice that human Society cannot realize on earth without self-destruction. Social inequalities are a case in point. Other cases there are in which justice is attained, but not without opening up wounds that Society cannot heal and letting loose scourges which she cannot halt. We may instance here the seemingly useless sacrifice of human lives. Finally, there is a justice completely out of the jurisdiction of Society, namely, that which is involved every time our inner conscience is concerned or the very existence of society or its individual members is subject to one of these unforeseen trials over which no human force has any control.

Absolute justice is not of this world.

3

But if absolute justice is not of this world, whence is it? It belongs to another world. And as men could not be benefited by it if there were no future life, life after death is again demonstrated.

You may say that, while the deduction is perhaps correct, it is rather jumping at conclusions. It evades a difficulty by taking it, without proof, as solved. Is it not an exaggeration to consider the deficiencies of the present life under the sharp angle of justice? No one is obliged to do what is impossible. Social inequalities, frequent triumphs of evil over virtuous men, irreparable misfortunes, sudden accidents, no power in this world, not even the concentration of human wills in the collective strength of society, can prevent.

They are simply unavoidable because they belong to the nature of things. Is not pretending to suppress them the same as trying to keep stones from falling or animals from devouring their prey? If such is the case, are we not caught by the very principle which we have repeatedly invoked, namely, that a natural tendency is never frustrated in its effort to attain its object? Is not universality the test of a natural tendency? And is not universality applicable to the present case?

The spectacle of human life lies open before our eyes and suggests to us the hopelessly relative character of earthly justice. Therefore man cannot logically demand more. And if he does, he deceives himself. He conceives a notion of chimerical justice, without any relation to reality and contrary to everyday experience. His appeal from this earthly to a transcendent and supraterrestrial justice is without foundation. It is the product of an arbitrary construction of the mind.

The more you insist on the relative character of this world's justice, the more strongly do you bring out the strangeness of this fact—for it is a fact—that man craves for an absolute justice incompatible with his present condition.

Mankind is no longer young. It has lived through a respectable number of centuries, nay, thousands of centuries. Many times it has begun the experiment of life anew. And experience, with a monotonous regularity, brought to all the answer that everywhere and at all times inequality follows birth, aptitudes, fortune; luck favors some and forgets others; war or cataclysms mow down countless victims; the mighty oppress the lowly with impunity, and virtue is too often conquered by triumphant vice. Were not such lessons, repeated thousands of times, sufficient to teach man a realistic and more moderate notion of justice?

Justice, mankind might have concluded, is not altogether a blue mirage; for, after all, in spite of the crushing deficit which it drags through generations, it succeeds in blazing a narrow trail through this strange world. But there are limits which it seems powerless to pass. Let us accept it as it is; let us even try to improve it; but let us not pull down our house under the fallacious pretext that it is poorly built or inadequately furnished. There is no reacting against fatality. Our lot is measured. To ask for more would be useless and absurd.

Is this not the language of common sense? Does it not seem that mankind, having progressed in wisdom and experience, ought to speak thus, more and more, in order to give expression to truth?

That in the first stages of its evolution, mankind might have believed itself capable of breaking the circle in which it felt itself enclosed, is admissible. Youth is subject to sanguine impulses and is a victim of generous illusions. But mankind is no longer young. It has encountered obstacles and burned its wings often enough to be aware of its own powerlessness. Our very incapacity makes us realize the truth; to the idea of justice corresponds exactly what experience obliges and allows us to put into it—nothing more. Justice is necessarily, by its very nature, limited and relative.

But mankind cannot undertake to speak thus; or, if you prefer, in the very instant it speaks thus, it also talks in an altogether different way. And, singularly enough, it is not principally at the dawn of its history that it speaks thus, but exactly the reverse: the more it progresses in civilization, the more imperious and exacting its word becomes, the more it breaks into complaints. Relative justice does not suffice. Mankind requires absolute, unconditional, unreserved justice. And unfortunately, this cry, often misleading, threatens to cause men to upset and even destroy their abode on earth.

What is there at the bottom of those passionate claims which causes human society to thrill with rebellion or terror? Socialism, Communism, Bolshevism—what are all these if not an appeal to an impossible justice—impossible because founded upon a concept of equality not applicable to this world;—impossible because, even should men succeed in ruining established institutions on the pretext that they are bad, it will sooner or later become necessary to start others on exactly the same plan;—impossible because the very men who boast of having founded the justice of their dreams, submissively acquiesce in the justice fancied by their hatred.

In a day of folly, the government is destroyed, all aristocracies are drowned in blood—the aristocracy of wealth, the aristocracy of thought, the aristocracy of labor, the aristocracy of religion. And when the slaughter is over, when the intoxication of revenge and disorder is dissipated, the same power reappears, more despotic than ever, and sets up an aristocracy more exacting, with inequalities of condition and fortune more shocking than ever. In Russia the autocracy of Bolshevism has replaced the autocracy of the Tsar. This is the point we have reached after many thousands of years of experience of the relative character of mundane justice. Are men not yet convinced? Much less perhaps than they were in those remote times when peoples yielded slavish obedience to the caprices of their masters, whilst they were hardly conscious of their servitude.

We have "progressed" since. Our modern revolutionists, though a terrible danger to society, at least prove that there is in human nature a strong tendency to outrun the moderately "realistic" idea of earthly justice.

But, letting alone the promoters of public disorder, let us address the honest, the good men. They do not seem to have this easy abandonment which they should have if it really were the result of habit and long training. They have, I grant, their own philosophy, in which timid resignation curbs excessive ambitions. And still, within the very limits of the grind of daily cares, how many bitter complaints and obscure revolts! At times the malaise is so chafing that it turns to blasphemy. If there is a good God (men say), why does He show Himself so very seldom? Could He not spare us useless trials? Prevent sickness or death from striking the breadwinner of the family? Would it not be better to take away this good-for-nothing drunkard, who makes the life of his wife and children a hell upon earth? Why does God not cure this poor rickety child for whom sanitarium and hospital can do nothing? Why is bread so very expensive and adulterated milk sold at a prohibitive price? Once on a cold December day, when there had been a heavy snowfall and the ministry had just fallen at the Chamber of Deputies, a good concierge was sweeping the sidewalk frantically, saying: "After all, the government above is no better than our own!" The litany of complaints made by the man in the street to the Prime Mover is endless and couched at times in most unexpected words. If the sense of a more perfect justice has found a touching expression anywhere, it is in the souls of those lowly, humble people who are crushed under life's burdens and cannot afford the amusements by which rich people distract themselves, and escape the anguish of perplexing problems. Even the "popular" movies fail to calm them.

Are the rich more contented? I doubt it. More than many others, they suffer from the ingratitude of their fellowmen, from jealousy and envy, which watch them like the eyes of beasts of prey glowing in the dark. Their good fortune isolates them from the crowd and often robs them of the right to be pitied. If they are visited by moral trials, the pity which is held out to them is rarely sincere. This is unjust, for there is no common measure between the material goods and those of the mind and heart. And how many among those pet children of fortune have suffered atrociously for being treated as if they were not men like other men, and as if the wealth they possess should single them out for hatred and contempt. It is not their fault that they were born amid the splendors of a palace. Nor is it their fault that they do not see under its true aspect the distress and misery of the poor. Their training and their surroundings have distorted their judgment through no fault of their own. And when reduced to the common level of mankind by one of those strokes which spare no one here below, their surprise is often poignant. They in turn complain, and their cry, though less dangerous than that of violent agitators and less touching than that of the lowly sufferers, luridly sets off the relative character of social inequalities.

But why multiply experiences? The desire and hope of a better justice thrives everywhere. It is not the exclusive property of those whom we call the "disinherited." From one point of view or another, we must not forget, all men believe themselves "disinherited" and all crave for the advent of perfect justice. Sages and saints are no exception to this rule. True, they do not cherish vain illusions; but ask them whether they believe in the possible advent of justice in this world, and they will answer you with a smile and invite you to contemplate the summits of light from which their souls are, as it were, illumined.

They will tell you: We have no lasting abode here below. The present life is a necessary, painful, transitory trial. By dint of devotedness and generous love mankind will be able to improve, to a certain extent, the conditions of justice here below, to make society more balanced, to bring it nearer to its ideal, to combat and abolish some moral and material scourges. But the present economy is comprehensible only if conceived as the basis of an edifice the top of which is not on earth, but in the other world. And on this summit resides the supreme Judge, who sees and knows by name all the actors in the great human tragedy.

His justice is not founded upon social inequalities, or on luck or failure, or even (should you be surprised at that?) on the more or less heavy burden of sufferings which He allows life to place on your shoulders; for there are many ways of suffering. His justice knows but one law and one measure: the worth of the moral act, dictated by conscience, realized by the action of the will. Man, be he great or lowly, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, has but one title to boast of before this Supreme Judge, namely, his fidelity to duty. And God, who governs this world, in His providence has so prepared everything that every man is able to do his duty. Circumstances differ, but the obligation is the same for all, and the reward is rigorously proportioned to the efforts put forth.

Everyone, with the means put at his disposal, fortune or poverty, talent or very limited intelligence, from top to bottom, at every degree of the social scale, sometimes in joy, generally in sorrow, is invited (if I may use the phrase) to play his part in the gigantic test which this earthly sojourn spells for mankind.

At the end, inequality persists, according to the sum of virtue engaged in the indispensable struggle against self, the passions, and all forces of evil. But this time inequality is absolute justice, for it does not depend on blind forces which man has been unable to bridle; it is the result and crown of a free endeavor. In this superior order—the order of conscience, the moral order—we are the masters of our destiny.

Outside of this intimate satisfaction, caused by the fulfillment of duty and of the divine will, the intention and designs of which we cannot fathom, no one can hope to receive a definite reward in this life. The place of justice without appeal, of reparations and compensations, the place where the good obtain their reward and the wicked undergo their punishment, is beyond the grave. A few years more of faith and hope, of patience and courage, and the eternal dawn will come to dispel the horrible nightmare of the earth's iniquities.

Such is the answer of believers, of saints and sages, at least in its main outlines. And you understand that, to omit it, would have been a sin against impartiality.

Confess, if you were not convinced in advance, confess now that, of all the solutions proposed for the problem of destiny, this is the most attractive, since, though marvelously concise, it does not leave a single point in darkness, a single objection unanswered. Moreover, by introducing the claims of conscience into the center of the problem, it gives us the secret of that universal craving of mankind for a more perfect justice than that dispensed on earth. The voice within us which demands the rectification of human values is that of conscience. Conscience is the intimate sense of what is good and what is evil, just and unjust, relatively and absolutely right.

More profoundly still, conscience may be defined as the light which reveals to us the splendid reality of human nature. Through conscience we have the unconquerable assurance that we possess the strange but inalienable power of being the masters of our own destiny and that no material force can subject us to its blind laws, no condition of individual or social existence can prevent us from being free and tending directly towards truth and goodness. Through conscience we have the presentiment, nay, the certitude, that even in the midst of the anonymous whirlwind which carries us, an eye is resting on us, following our steps, never loses sight of us, and distinguishes us amidst the countless human atoms spread like dust over the face of the earth; an eye both merciless and kind, which can appreciate at their right value our struggles, our efforts and our sufferings when nobly accepted. Through conscience, finally, the face of this world is changed and, as under a magic wand, the gorgeous architecture of solid order itself pales into insignificance, and through its transparent veil the procession of virtuous acts and real merits ascends luminously, peacefully, and pacifyingly to Heaven.

Conscience, alas! has not always the purity, the limpidity of translucid crystal. It can be warped or clouded under the influence of error, prejudice, or passion. It can narrow its horizons and get lost in small disputes. But it is never warped or clouded to the extent of being unable to affirm, in some way or other, its presence and action.

The embittered man, whose mind has been perverted by subversive doctrines, assaults legitimate institutions and dreams of a chimerical equality, the desire for which hardly conceals his shameful lusts. He deceives himself and becomes a public danger. And still, in his invisible blindness, he obscurely feels that this present life does not contain the whole explanation of human destiny, but that, when all is said and done, another coördination of values remains possible, nay, desirable.

The short-sighted man, who incessantly laments his sad condition, accuses Providence, confounds in one anathema Heaven and earth, sins by pusillanimity of judgment. Even in his narrowness of mind, and because of it, he testifies to that earthly existence which is and remains an insoluble problem if it fails to open a vista on a world where the just balance is reëstablished between those who, without having apparently merited it, enjoy the goods of this earth or suffer its pangs.

Virtuous men, sages and saints, go farther. What the revolutionary denies, what the narrow and pusillanimous mind hesitates to admit, they proclaim loudly and fearlessly. Conscience speaks. They listen to its voice, its internal voice, and they believe, with their whole soul, in the existence of this transcendent judge, who probes the minds and hearts of men. In them the human craving for absolute justice finds its most perfect expression as well as the quenching which it demands.

And now the problem becomes more precise. Is moral conscience right or wrong?

4

To answer this question we must go back to our starting-point. The discussion centered about this principle—the application of which seemed to turn against our position—that a need directly founded on nature is never frustrated. The existence of such a need is proved by the universality of its craving. Now, the relative character of human justice as well as its deficiencies are universal phenomena. Society takes men as they are. It judges them according to their actual condition. It does not and cannot take into account the mysterious antecedents which assign to men their birth, their environment, their aptitudes. Besides, men in the course of the present life undergo diverse sorts of treatment, and this diversity no earthly power is able to change, because the factors in the case are beyond control. It follows that if the justice of this world is universally relative and deficient, man's natural right cannot go farther. The extension of this right is sharply defined and limited by the universality of the fact. In other words, by nature man can hope and claim but a relative and deficient justice.

Is this conclusion legitimate? Before answering definitively, it is advisable to submit man to a stricter examination. It would seem that a long experience of failure in getting a better justice here below should have discouraged him, in view of the fact that the experiment has lasted long enough to produce in him a sort of resigned wisdom. But, against all expectations, we witness a singular phenomenon: Mankind did not obtain wisdom from its experience, nor did it bow under the inflexible lesson of ages, but its conscience keeps on craving for this apparently impossible justice. It claims it passionately, and in order to obtain it, does not hesitate at times to plunge into undertakings bound to fail against the organization of its actual life. It claims it with an invincible security, with the calm of a soul which fancies that it has deciphered the mystery of our present life and waits for the advent of another justice, from which good and evil will finally receive the reward or punishment they respectively deserve.

This call of conscience is universal, because, under a diversity of forms, it employs the same imperious language. And thus we are again confronted with a formidable antinomy, which sets up against each other two orders of phenomena, both of which have the same character of universality.

How can we solve this difficulty? It is very easy to say that human nature is contradictory; but that would be a mere evasion. Examine the question from the angle which seems to you most conformable to your ideas, your philosophical conceptions, and I dare say this kind of crudely sceptical explanation will not satisfy you.

Do you bring in directly (as is proper) God's creative omnipotence? Then evidence is at hand. The field of divine intelligence embraces the infinity of possibles, and that means that, by definition, it excludes what is contradictory and absurd. Do you bring in the neutral testimony of anonymous nature? Nature, as we have repeatedly remarked, by the *ensemble* of its productions, always aims at order and harmony. Do you accept the theory of evolution? Evolution, even the most mechanistic and determinist, does not blunder so as to build machines that do not work or fly-wheels that clash with and destroy one another. No, man's nature cannot be in contradiction with itself.

To speak with greater precision: It is impossible for man to desire both absolute and relative justice at the same time and under the same aspect. Man cannot identify two planes of justice whose inclines lead in opposite directions. The orientation which submits human nature to the relative and deficient justice of this world is one thing; that which obliges us to appeal from this relative and deficient justice to an absolute one, is another. Either possesses its own field and aims at a different plane. And since the earthly plane is unable to answer our call to the absolute, the only rational solution is to admit that beyond this plane there is another, which is not of this world and becomes accessible to man only in another life.

Thus only can the painful mystery of the present life be explained. Thus only can the claims of conscience be satisfied.

For, if our actual life, with the social obligations it imposes, the unequality of conditions which it cannot suppress, the trials which it cannot spare us, is but a portico erected at the entrance to eternal mansions, and above all an indispensable means to reach complete justice and happiness, why should we hesitate to perform our tasks faithfully, generously, uncomplainingly, and submissively?

The path is steep; but after all, it is only a path— on one assumption, however; namely, that this superterrestrial plane be not a desert, and that we may find there the incorruptible and merciful Judge in whose glance we can read the reflection and image of our efforts, our victories, and our merits. But the reality of this infinite Presence is claimed by moral conscience as a right. There can be no justice without a judge, no life after death without a God. This is why of all those who in the course of ages scrutinized the problem of destiny, the most far-seeing were the saints. They have clearly perceived the truth, and their vision has not only the value and bearing of a psychological "document,"—it is the expression of Truth.

An earthly and passing trial; a supreme Judge; a sentence from which there can be no appeal—here in its plenitude and harmonious simplicity is the testimony of conscience concerning life after death.

VI

REASON

Thus, from whatever angle we look at it, humanity seems to be bound for a goal located far beyond the confines of this terrestrial world. When, in all docility, we follow the lead of this general tendency, we are sometimes confronted by the simple idea of life after death; at other times we dimly see that this idea of a future life may be modified by another and more precise concept, namely, that of immortality. Such a sheaf of converging conclusions ought to furnish a valid argument.

Nevertheless, the moment has come to ask ourselves with perfect sincerity: Have we obtained definitive certitude concerning the subject in hand?

As a preliminary consideration, it will not be superfluous to recall briefly the classical distinction between the different degrees of certitude. After that, it will suffice to place opposite them the results of our previous research.

Certitude may be moral, physical, or metaphysical.

Moral certitude is founded upon a study of the laws which determine human activity. For instance, several witnesses who are favorably located and whose good will is unassailable, testify to the existence of an object or event which I have not seen. As these witnesses could neither be deceived nor have the perverse intention of deceiving me, I have, through them, certitude as to the existence of the said object or event.

Physical certitude is based upon the study of the laws that determine those phenomena in which human liberty has no part. Inanimate bodies, abandoned to themselves, fall to earth in obedience to the law of gravity, and the distances traversed by them per second can be exactly measured. These velocities having been repeatedly verified and corroborated by varied and conclusive experiments, I am certain that, as long as the conditions of the experiment are not changed, all falling bodies will obey this law.

Lastly, we obtain metaphysical certitude, when, taking our stand on first and self-evident principles, we draw from them logical conclusions by means of correct reasoning. This third class of certitude is the highest because it reveals to us the ultimate "why" of things. Moral and physical certitude do indeed prove to us the existence of certain phenomena and of the laws that govern them. But they tell us nothing of the primary cause of their being and operation. Now the human mind is so constituted that nothing can fully satisfy it except the knowledge of this final cause or ultimate "why."

Concerning the object of our research, can we affirm that we have answered this ultimate "why"? Do we know, in final analysis, "why" man survives himself? Have we discovered the imperishable foundations upon which his craving for immortality is founded?

Let us be humble and confess that we have not.

The proofs obtained so far may give us, respectively, moral or physical certitude: they cannot give metaphysical certitude. Nor do they, for various reasons, always attain even that degree of evidence required by real certitude.

Hence, in the testimony rendered by the universe we may find a surmise, an intimation of general import, but not a demonstration strictly so called. No doubt, the study of moral consciousness can lead us, experimentally and inductively, to admit the existence of a life beyond. But it does not constitute an absolutely invincible proof for immortality. The induction drawn from the history of religions might lead us a step farther, did it not lend itself to an interpretation open to criticism. The same might be said of the suggestions of metapsychics, which, in every hypothesis, still remains in a rudimentary state, though not without promise. And nowhere have we seen the rigorous proof before which reason bows in assent because the problem has been sounded to rock-bottom.

Ought I to beg pardon for subjecting the conclusions reached in our previous chapters to this stream of cold light?

No; for the first duty of the patient enquirer is to surround himself with every safeguard against light-hearted enthusiasm. He must, like the sailor on the high seas, take his bearings at fixed times.

Far from me, however, be the temptation to treat with disdain the materials already collected. They are scattered here and there, like ears of wheat left on the stubble-field after the gleaners have passed, and merely lack the bond which will transform them into a single sheaf.

Is there such a bond? We shall enquire into the question at once.

I

You may, perhaps, recall that, at the beginning of our lectures, we enquired into the history of the universe, and I declared that, strictly speaking, we had a proof, one single proof, for the existence of life after death and for the immortality of the soul; namely, the proof derived from an analysis of the human intellect.

If we assert that man will survive because, by his very nature, he seems to have been created to wrest from the universe its secrets, we, by that very assertion, insinuate that the intellect is the source of all life beyond the grave. If we invoke the testimony of conscience and its need of absolute justice, we are again dealing with the intellect, because the concept of justice is an eminently intellectual one. If we turn to the various forms of religious belief and collect their appeals to a life beyond, we re-open the trial of the intellect. For if religion proceeds from religious sentiment, religious sentiment in its turn presupposes an act of thought. The savage, even though encumbered with a confusion of sensations and images, in setting up bonds of unexpected causality amongst incongruous phenomena, performs an act of the intellect. The mechanism of his mind functions in disastrous fashion, but it functions, and from it primitive man derives the belief, the institutions, the rites, the essential outlines of his religion. And in like manner does all belief imply an act of the intellect, a "theology," wherein the intervention of the mind is manifestly revealed.

It is of the utmost importance, then, that we go deeper into the study of this faculty, diffused, so to speak, round and about the different environments through which we have successively passed. Its presence can be felt everywhere, and it begins to dawn upon us that it may constitute the bond we need to bind our sheaf.

Why has the intellect the heavy responsibility of furnishing decisive proof for immortality? And how far do the other testimonies share the light of the intellect?

These are questions of paramount importance, though somewhat abstract, and hence calculated to give a rather austere turn to our lecture. But what matters it, provided we find the truth as a reward of our toil?

What is the intellect? From the very start, let us avoid the ambiguous terms invented by certain systems of contemporary philosophy. So confusedly is the word "intellect" used in their parlance that it reminds one of the word "thing" used by children to convey the meaning of almost every object.

Instead of employing at random the word "intellect" or "intelligence," let us adopt the more general term, "knowledge." Thus we shall be able to understand more clearly, by means of comparison, the characteristic features of the subject in hand.

Next we shall see that all knowledge is distributed on three distinct and superposed planes.

There is, first of all, sense knowledge. I see, I hear, I touch. The impression of exterior objects, transmitted by my sensory organs, reaches my brain and calls forth a reaction by which, so to speak, there is traced upon the brain a direct and immediate copy of the things heard, seen, or touched.

In the second place, there is imaginative knowledge. The impression received by the senses, though it grows faint in time, does not completely vanish, but leaves a permanent trace.

If you look fixedly at an object and then close your eyes, you will continue for the space of one or two seconds to perceive the object just as if you were still gazing at it. Then this fugitive vision, too, will vanish. And yet a little later, you can again fix your attention upon the vanished object: without being obliged to have recourse to your senses, you will realize that there still exists within you a representation of the same object—faint and vague, it is true, yet distinct. You possess, in effect, the faculty of recording the images of things perceived by the senses. These images are also called memories or souvenirs, and the recording faculty is termed imaginative memory, or simply, imagination.

Do sense cognition and imaginative cognition exhaust our capacity for knowledge? By no means. Beyond the plane of sensation and beyond that of images, careful study reveals to us a third plane, disclosing new properties and having nothing in common with the respective characteristics of the other two.

My eyes make a survey of the realities that surround them. Each object, without exception, seems to be endowed with distinct individuality. This platform from which I am addressing you, that crucifix suspended on the wall, those windows, those lamps, are all concrete things possessing definite external forms that are communicable and distinguish them from one another.

If, in the next place, I consider the impressions stored away in my imagination, the same fact is noticed, though at first sight it is not so evident.

Here, as we have already seen, our knowledge is less precise. One would imagine that the contour and relief of objects tended to become shadowy, to take on the aspect of a phantom. What is the cause of this species of degradation? It is attributable, in the first place, to the weakness of memory. The impression lacks depth, for it has been deposited upon a soil that is either too soft or too hard. And yet, at times, the impression is etched with uncommon clearness, thanks to a lively imagination and an exceptionally retentive memory. But such may also be the lot of a less gifted memory when the imagination has been stimulated in a very special manner. There are events in our lives of which we preserve a very exact and vivid remembrance. We ourselves testify to the fact: "The impression is ineffaceably graven upon my memory," we say; or: "I still see the scene as if it were present before me."

But the lack of precision that characterizes so many of our images may have yet another cause. In our memory recollections of similar origin summon one another, marshal their forces, then blend into a sort of collective schema, such as would result from the superposition of the divers profiles of objects of the same species cut out of glass. Thus before the imagination of a school-boy who, busy with an exercise in narration, labors to describe a horse, there arises at first but an imperfect silhouette, which, strictly speaking, does not correspond to any definite horse; yet this silhouette is the deposit and combination of the images of all the horses he has ever seen.

This strange phenomenon cannot throw us off our cue. Indeed, this collective image is a composite one, formed as it is from the residue of sensations produced by contact with several concrete and similar objects. It would be difficult, not to say impossible, to restore to each sensible impression its corresponding residue. However, to a certain degree this restitution is not prohibited. The geologist is incapable of distinguishing the minute stratifications of an ancient mound because, little by little, layers of a similar nature have become closely welded, thus forming a solid mass. But strata of more recent origin may be identified because the slow process of welding and interpenetration has not yet sufficiently advanced. In like manner, and for analogous reasons, you cannot separate from one another the more remote images cemented and solidified in the substratum of your memory. Yet, by an effort of attention and analysis, you can, at times, recall these exterior objects which correspond to your more recent recollections, and in this way detect the mechanism underlying the formation of your collective images, just as the geologist detects the mechanism that underlies the formation of stratified soils.

To sum up: there is no essential difference between the senses and the imagination, as far as the quality of the materials is concerned. In both cases these materials, borrowed from the exterior world, are recorded and preserved with their individual and concrete characteristics.

Now, if you continue to travel in the regions of knowledge, you will not fail to find a third plane, differing widely from the first two; I refer to the plane of intellectual knowledge, the realm of pure ideas. Let us explore it with care.

My intellect conceives the idea of a tree. A tree, as we all know, belongs to the plant world. It possesses life, but lacks sensibility. (I am speaking, to be sure, of the classic tree, and as I do not pretend to set myself up as a professor of botany, I shall not discuss the case of the sensitive plant, *mimosa pudica.*) The tree, to be more exact, will be, if you like, a fine and sturdy oak, whose structure offers no exceptional feature.

What, then, is an oak tree? Learned scientists will tell us: a member of the vegetable kingdom, of the branch called phanerograms, of the sub-branch angisperms, of the class dicotyledons, of the order apetalae, of the family amentacae, and of the tribe cupulifers. This definition is extremely abstract. Assuredly it does not suggest the majestic oak which you admired out in the city park! The authors of the definition quoted above seem to have made it their business to eliminate all personal notes. For a fact, if you were to translate the definition into everyday language, this impression would be confirmed. The oak is a phanerogam, that is to say, a flowering plant, distinguished from a cryptogam, which does not bear flowers. It is an angiosperm, *i. e.*, a plant one of whose reproductive organs, the ovule, is wrapped in the ovary, thus differing from the gymnosperms, which possess an ovule without an ovary. It is a dicotyledon, whose seed requires two leaves saturated with nutritive material, while the monocotyledons call for only one such leaf. It is an apetalous plant, that is to say, it flowers without petals, thus being opposed to other dicotyledons whose flowers require petals, either joined or separate. It is an amentaceous plant, whose male flowers are fixed upon long filaments or catkins, to distinguish them from the male flowers of other plants. Lastly, it is a cupulifer, whose fruit is surrounded at the base by a cupule or cup, thus differing from fruits lacking a cup. And the nomenclature does not end even here. The cupule of the acorn has not the same shape as that of the beech or the horse-chestnut; and thus the special shape of this cup differentiates the oak from the rest of the cupulifers.

This "translation" will permit you to grasp the method by means of which the botanist defines his oak. This imposing plant presents, to the eyes of the uninitiated, such a multitude of aspects and characteristics, that only a photograph could do them justice. But the scientist is not disturbed by this bewildering complexity. He almost completely discards this confused multitude and keeps only one characteristic, which, to us, seems so insignificant. It is true that this tiny characteristic belongs also, and just as much, to the "family," the "class," the "sub-branch," and the "branch"; with all of which the oak is rightfully connected. But from top to bottom in this hierarchy there is always the same procedure: from amongst all of the characteristics that are worthy of choice, a single one is kept, and this choice is not arbitrary, because, as you have already noticed, it always implies an absolute contrast between what is and what is not.

In view of what we have said it is not difficult to understand why the definition of an oak, thus formulated, no longer possesses those individual features and peculiarities which appeal to the senses or to the imagination. The definition is "abstract" precisely because it ignores whatever is merely individual and singular.

Nay, more. The scientist, armed with his crabbed yet valuable definition, is sure to recognize this tree, no matter whither his excursions may lead him, for wherever he perceives the famous little green cup encompassing the base of the acorn, he will say with invincible assurance: this is an oak-tree. His definition, his "idea" of the oak is abstract, but precisely because it is abstract, it is universal, that is applicable, without exception, to all individuals which possess in the concrete the accidents stripped from the image in order to form the idea.

Let us sum up. If I retire within myself in order to analyze the idea obtained by the method just described, I find that my idea of the oak has been stripped of all individuality. It no longer represents to me such and such a tree, as a visual sensation would do; nor does it represent a simple or a collective residue of sensations that have reached the state of image. If at the moment that I conceive the idea, a vague spectre of an oak tree floats across my memory, I cannot, try as I may, explain the extraordinary transformation that has taken place in my mode of cognition. For my idea no longer corresponds either to one particular oak or to many such oaks that my eyes have perceived in the past. It corresponds to every oak, existing or non-existing, present or future, actual or potential. It is the absolute notion of a species.

In order to bring home to you the nature of the idea, it seemed preferable to take my illustration from a well-known field of scientific investigation. But it is, of course, taken for granted that the result would be the same if, instead of following this somewhat lengthy road, we were simply to write down, with regard to any object whatever, the characteristics of the sensation or of the image on one side, and of the idea or concept on the other.

Moreover, I take the liberty to tell you that, in order to grasp the solid reasons that underlie the process of abstracting the idea, it does not suffice to listen to, or to read, the report of someone else's experience. Personal labor is required—the labor of going through the same experience. Try it. Proceed from the sensation to the image, from the image to the idea; then retrace your steps from the idea to the image, from the image to the sensation; begin over again several times, and after thus moving back and forth, you will perceive, little by little, that the three planes are distinct, as distinct as the foreground and the background of a photograph, seen in perspective through the lenses of a stereoscope. The attempt is worth while, because it will prepare you to grasp the fundamental proof for the immortality of the soul.

Before attaining this end, which, perhaps, seems as yet far off, I must—even at the risk of monotonous repetition—explain the structure of the idea and the properties that flow from this structure.

In the first place, you will perceive that an idea is independent of space. Does the ideal oak, which exists in my mind as well as in yours, have real existence in space? Does it exist in this part of the world where I am living, or in Europe, Asia, or Oceanica? Is it to be found on this earth, or on a planet of our solar system, such as Mars or Venus? Is it irradiated by Sirius or the Polar Star?

Idle questions, these, because, as a matter of fact, my ideal oak is found neither here nor there, neither on earth nor in heaven. It exists nowhere, it inhabits no place. And yet, I might say with equal justice that it is in a thousand places at once, because wherever oak trees grow, the idea is realized in the concrete. Nay, more. The idea can transport itself to a thousand other places where oaks do not exist, but where they can sprout and grow. The idea ceases to be subject to the tyrannical laws of space.

It is also free from the control of time. This statement seems still more improbable than the preceding, yet it is true. To what date can we trace the birth of the first oak? Neither you nor I can tell, because neither you nor I were present to witness the event. Perhaps there was not then a single human being capable of testifying to the agreement of the idea with its initial concrete reality. Ever since, generations of oaks have passed away, each one reproducing, in numberless copies, the idea that is mine to-day.

The idea that is mine! . . . Is there not in this expression some exaggeration and pretension on my part? That I possess this idea is true, inasmuch as I can cause it to leap, like a spark, from the exterior world wherein it has assumed bodily shape. But it would be more correct to say that I borrowed it, for had the exterior world not suggested it to me, I should search in vain for it in the depths of my intellect. In this respect the position of the first man who was privileged to contemplate an oak differed in nowise from mine: he too would be receiving an object lesson. Like myself, he simply turned towards the material world that mirror wherein is reflected the abstract and universal representation of all existing things. In a certain sense I may say that I received the idea, and hence the idea existed before my birth, just as it existed before the appearance of any human being.

Where did the idea pre-exist? Was it in the tree, or in the series of trees, that gave it concrete existence? Even though I examine the secret structure of plants and their habits, yet I do not find in them any aptitude to apprehend the idea. They reproduce it with marvelous constancy and regularity, but they merely carry out a plan of which they know nothing and which they follow blindly unless prevented by invincible obstacles. They, too, after a fashion, have received the watchword of the ideal. They are not the authors of the idea, nor did they receive it from us. It existed before them and before us. Hence there was a moment—the expression is altogether inadequate—when the idea did not exist in time in any way whatsoever, which is tantamount to saying that, for the idea, time is an accidental condition, or, in other words, the idea, by its very nature, is indifferent to time.

Independent of space, independent of time, the idea manifests yet other properties which derive from its twofold character of abstraction and universality. In their essence, these properties are somewhat less pure, somewhat more akin to practical reality, and by that very fact more striking, and, above all, more easily apprehended. It is of the utmost importance, then, to give them close attention for the purpose of deeper study.

I refer to the power—I had almost said, the omnipotence—of the idea.

Take, for instance, the part the idea plays in the work of a philosopher. In the silence of his study he constructs his system. His work is arid. It is protected against the curiosity of the unlettered by its very vastness and its cabalistic terminology. Nevertheless, it faces publicity, and appears in print. His work fails to gain recognition, and may for some time remain in obscurity. But other thinkers at last discover and appreciate its worth. They are beguiled by its principles; it becomes the object of their study, is developed and retouched, and the philosopher, hitherto unknown or unappreciated, becomes the head of a school, the distinguished leader of a great movement of thought.

Little by little, a third contingent of laborers enters the field, that of the popularizers. Not only do they excel in grasping the most abstract conceptions; but their turn of mind inclines them to foresee the consequences that these ideas may entail in the social and moral order. And as they speak or write with clearness and enthusiasm, they are listened to by the majority of cultivated people and their works are accepted. Lastly, from the ranks of the cultured, the philosopher's thought filters down into the masses.

At this stage, the thought has become anonymous. It is no longer the property of this or that man, but of everybody. Besides, it disdains arguments and proofs, for it has reached the stage of insinuating axioms or sweeping assertions. It is no longer a subject for discussion, but is adopted and passively repeated, and in proportion as the thought is rehearsed and believed, it is transformed into tendencies and acts.

Acts and tendencies find utterance in outbursts of opinion and in press campaigns. One after another, the novel, the newspaper, the review, the theater, nay, even the moving-picture and the radio, take up and hammer out the idea, and often the current, swelled by so many tributaries, overflows and saps the very foundations of century-old institutions.

And what is there at the bottom of this prodigious movement? Apparently nothing, or almost nothing;

only a philosopher whose theories were not relished by the crowd, and who had ample time to disappear before they could reach the masses. Such philosophers were, for instance, the French Encyclopædists, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, whose disciples at fifth or sixth hand have probably never opened a single book of their master's. In fact, while they stand by their master's theories for better or for worse, they do not know him directly, but his ideas have reached them, and to their harm. Let us take another example. An obscure scientist is at work in his laboratory. Some detail, insignificant to anyone but himself, has set him, almost by chance, on the track of a rare discovery. The lid of a saucepan filled with boiling water is pushed up by the steam. A bit of paper is attracted by a stick of sealing-wax and repelled by a glass rod. Rings of cloth, zinc, or copper, arranged in a pile and placed in acidulated water, produce a feeble electric current. Examined under a microscope, the blood of a man bitten by a mad dog reveals the presence of infinitesimal organisms. Of what benefit can all this be to humanity toiling and moiling to eke out a meagre livelihood?

But after a few years Papin's saucepan has become a powerful locomotive, which, with fiery trail and terrifying speed, transports millions of travelers and tons of merchandise. Volta's pile has inaugurated many practical applications of electricity: the lighting of our cities, the telegraph and the telephone, and many other marvels whose list is not yet closed. The discovery of the hydrophobia bacillus, followed by that of analogous bacilli, led the way for the cure of maladies hitherto incurable.

Nor is this all. Steam and electricity have revolutionized the conditions of modern life. The progress of machinery has released the great forces of industry in every form, but also raised up formidable problems along economic, social, and international lines. The discoveries of Pasteur have revolutionized hygiene, medicine, and surgery.

And what was there so extraordinary about the origin of these transformations whose amplitude and quasi-suddenness make us dizzy? Nothing, or almost nothing, apparently: merely an idea in the minds of men who, most of them, lived, so to speak, on the frontiers of society. And their ideas, infinitely expanded and developed, to-day dominate the material, moral, and intellectual life of nations, as supremely, to say the least, as the idea of the philosopher.

One more example, widely differing from the other two, yet very suggestive also.

More than a thousand years ago, on the plain of the Delta watered by the fertile Nile, an Egyptian scribe was engraving upon a stone an inscription in hieroglyphs and Greek letters. This scribe, whose name will never be known, died, and the stela fashioned by his hand was buried in the ground. Nineteen centuries sped by. Then Egypt, thanks to Bonaparte, threw open her temples and cities of the dead to the researches of European scientists. Yet the secret of her subterranean life remained unknown, for no one had as yet solved the enigma of its characters, when lo! the stela of the ancient scribe chanced to see again the light of day, and met the genial glance of Champollion. At once a legion of scholars set to work, until, by the magic of ceaseless discovery, there was unearthed the most marvelous civilization of antiquity, as bewitching as that of Babylon and Greece.

But what was there so extraordinary about the origin of this magnificent achievement of science? Apparently nothing. The servile thought of a passive mechanic who little dreamed of the marvels of which he would one day be the involuntary cause. The scribe had passed away, and with him the gay court which he served, and the flourishing cities and the waters of the Nile, and the swift current of time. Yet the thought, sleeping upon the rigid pillar, was watching like a trembling flame, until at last from it leaped the lightning flash of genius in the brain of Champollion; by rebound, as it were, after a lapse of two thousand years, it aroused the vocation of a Mariette, a Chabas, a Lepsius, a Maspero, the creators of modern Egyptology.

Such is the power wielded by the idea, although, apparently, it is nothing, or almost nothing. And yet who, after seeing it at work, would venture to assert that in reality it is nothing?

This idea, which belongs to neither time nor space, whose evanescent form our hands have not touched and our eyes have not seen—this idea, I say, holds in leash a boundless energy. It calls forth war or maintains peace at will. It is the author of all greatness and decadence; the destinies of individuals and of nations are its sport. Those who unleash it rarely know how far it may lead them; and they who receive it are generally unaware of the unlimited good or evil that it may bring in its train.

The idea springs from our brain, and yet, scarcely has it made its appearance, when it assumes the rôle of dictator and treats us as slaves.

It may be false, hostile, harmful; still, from the transcendent world whence it derives its own modality, it borrows its mysterious characteristics of impassible inviolability. Hence, humanity has no more dangerous foe than erroneous ideas, because error, alas, almost equals truth in its tenacity.

2

Have I lingered too long in describing the secondary or derived properties of the idea? I do not think so. On the contrary, it seems to me that one cannot oppose too energetically the practice, too common in our day, of treating the idea as something devoid of reality or efficaciousness.

As a matter of fact, this prejudice will enable us to discuss, on psychological grounds, the problem which must now be solved.

Disconcertingly materialistic in our views, we are apt to class together and equally disdain: Conceptualists, Idealists, and Utopians. As a rule, brute matter inspires us with a fear far deeper than that caused by intellectual systems. The rise of a new doctrine generally leaves us cold, except that it may cause us to smile; and it rarely happens that we investigate whether such and such a menace of social or international upheaval could not perhaps be traced back to the system that made us smile.

And yet, if it be true that the idea, on the one hand, does not belong to the sensible world, while, on the other, it plays a foremost part in the history of mankind, should not a light flash forth from the impact of these two classes of phenomena? That which exerts a real influence cannot be unreal. And if this reality is irreducible to the sensible, that is, to the material, order, is not this a proof that the idea belongs to a world of immaterial realities?

To some, such reasoning may seem tautologous. "That which is not material is immaterial," is a statement that would have delighted the late Monsieur de la Palice!

Pardon me, but the word "immaterial" may be understood in two ways: either negatively, that is, in opposition to a thing that does not exist; or positively, with reference to that which constitutes it in its essence and nature.

To forestall misunderstanding, let us replace the negative by a positive term, chosen, like all words of human speech, by convention. Instead of saying "immaterial," we will say "spiritual." And by this new and more convenient term we will designate that being or entity which possesses all those fundamental qualities which we analyzed and enumerated not long ago: abstraction, universality, independence of time and space, power of action.

The etymology of the word "spirit" is admirably fitted, moreover, to resume and denote the sum-total of these characteristics; because the "spirit" (*spiritus*) is the invisible breath, the mysterious animating principle whose presence is evinced, above all, by its effects.

On the other hand, let us not be satisfied with appearances and imagine that, because we have created or adopted a new word, we have also gained in knowledge of the thing. The qualification of "spiritual" signifies nothing more than the notions quoted above, and is to be used instead of a parenthesis placed opposite those attributes which we connect with a single center, and by means of which we positively isolate this center from a world inferior to its own.

That is how men of science proceed when, in the course of their experiments, they note the presence of new properties incompatible with those of substances already known. Thus, on discovering that rays reflected by the anti-cathode of a Crookes tube manifested properties in which the cathode rays are deficient, the inventor was forced to use a new term to designate these new rays. Henceforth they are called X rays, which term simply attributes to them properties to which other rays cannot lay claim.

In order legitimately to transfer these characteristics of the idea to a world which is no longer that of matter, it suffices to demonstrate the utter incompatibility of these same characteristics with those of matter. In that case, the introduction of a new term will be but the logical outcome of our demonstration, and, on that score, of secondary importance.

Now, having reached this point of the argument, is it so difficult to establish the proof?

Are material bodies endowed with the characteristic properties of the idea, that is, power of abstraction, universality, independence relative to time and space? The answer is evident.

Material bodies are not abstractions. They can be seen, heard, touched, tasted, felt. They are concrete, of which truth we can convince ourselves at our leisure, even at our own expense. But the idea, I repeat, eludes the grasp of the senses.

Material objects are not universal. Each one of them is itself, and nothing else. That oak which I see, whose rugged bark I can handle, to whose lulling music I listen when the wind plays with its foliage, is, after all, this or that oak and nothing more. The elements and the organs that compose it (cells, tissues, vessels, life-giving sap, roots, trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruit) are its exclusive and incommunicable property. Very different is the idea of an oak. It is not egotistical or individualistic; its range is inexhaustible. With it, my knowledge acquires infinite possibilities of comprehension. By it, I can assimilate an infinitude of identical objects.

Material objects monopolize a fixed portion of space. This oak belongs to such and such a forest, and to such and such a corner in that forest. If any one of its fellow-oaks tried, at any time, to occupy the same place, it was speedily evicted, because it is contrary to the laws of physics for two bodies to occupy the same place at the same time. But my idea disregards this law or this obstacle. The idea, as conceived by my mind, is, at one and the same moment, the reflection of the oak-tree of the plain, or of the mountain, or of the stately tree which during my walks I admired at the crossroads. Since it is the representative of a species, all oaks the world over, with ease and without interfering with one another, find in it their meeting-place, because, in order to gain admission, they were obliged to strip off all accidents that bind them, if I may venture to say so, to their local habitat.

Material objects appear and disappear in course of time, which measures their slow or rapid existences. My idea assists, with indifference, at the flux of the moment, because it is, at one and the same time, the ideal reflection of all the oaks of all ages—oaks dating back to the cavemen or to the time of Charlemagne, oaks of the present day and of the centuries yet to come.

And if, retiring for the last time within myself, I endeavor, with the obstinacy of one who dreads to become the prey of an illusion, to compare the notes of the idea with those of other modes of cognition, this supreme effort meets with supreme failure. Vainly would I strive to recover on these inferior planes, the characteristics of my idea: sensations, images, recollections, obstinately preserve their concrete and singular aspect, their dependence on time and space. I cannot change anything in this state of things; I must yield to objective evidence.

Let us advance another step.

In the course of a single day, I record a multiplicity of sensations and images. And yet, at times, this activity slows down or even ceases altogether. During sleep, my senses are at rest; my imagination, it is true, continues to work, and often in a most disorderly fashion: bizarre and improbable dreams and nightmares crowd in upon one another. Nevertheless, when I awake, I find it possible to stem the current of images. But there is also a deep, dreamless sleep.

Here are, incontestably, two phenomena belonging to our sensible consciousness: multiplicity and periods of inactivity. Now the multiplicity of acts cannot be explained except by the supposition that there exists an underlying centre of emanation or of reception. For we cannot perform a series of similar and distinct acts, without the permanent capacity for producing them. All the more, then, if the series is interrupted, but resumed later, ought we to admit that, in the interval which separates two moments of activity, the power to produce or to receive has not disappeared.

Hence, with regard to our sensations and images, we are obliged to admit the existence of a rallying-place or of a permanent centre of action. The focus wherein our sensations converge we shall call the sensitive faculty; that of images, the imaginative faculty.

Now, what is true of sensations and images, is true also of ideas. Our ideas are numerous, and we are not always engaged in thinking. We can pass at pleasure from one idea to another, stop at one in preference to another, and yet the idea of which we are no longer thinking has not disappeared, but we shall find it again later on. Hence the idea, too, belongs to a single and permanent faculty, to which we give the name of intellect.

And the intellect will be defined as the power of abstracting, universalizing, and preserving ideas. And inasmuch as the intellect abstracts and universalizes ideas, it is their logical cause. And as a cause, by its very nature, cannot be inferior to its effect—for in that case it could not produce the effect—we are forced to conclude that, since the idea is immaterial, the intellect which produced it must, *a fortiori*, be immaterial too.

Nor is this all. If the intellect were man's only faculty, we should be justified in asking ourselves whether it is independent and autonomous. But this is not the case. Amongst inferior beings, the multiplicity and diversity of their acts requires a multiplicity and diversity of faculties. But a multiplicity and diversity of faculties also requires a single centre of action serving as autonomous support to the whole group. This autonomous centre we shall call man's "nature," wherein, in their final analysis, are rooted all his receptive faculties and faculties of action. Human activity and receptivity excel those of all other creatures in richness and complexity; hence their corresponding faculties must also have their root in a "nature" of which they are, as it were, the members, or, better still, the supple and docile servants. But, I repeat, sound reason requires that there be a proportion between cause and effect, between the "nature" and the powers of which it is the centre and over which it holds sway. The intellect is immaterial. Hence there is in man's nature an immaterial element, and this characteristic and fundamental element is the human soul.

Thus, by means of a simple and logical argument we proceed little by little from the idea to the intellect, and from the intellect to the soul. But as we advance step by step in this ascent, one characteristic remains invariable and indelible: the ideas, the intellect, and the soul, one and all, participate in the same immaterial and spiritual essence.

The conclusion will be brief.

What is death? Why do we die?

We die because we are material, and in the measure in which we are material. Matter is the mobile and corruptible soil wherein beings separate into their component parts, collide and destroy one another.

What is disease? The corruption of an organ composed of an infinite number of cells, which, either because they are wearing out or because hostile forces within the organism attack, harass and exhaust one another until the forces of the body are spent.

Matter adapts itself well to the construction of marvelous buildings, of intricate machinery, of delicate textures, whose complexity astounds us. But this very luxury and elegance are the signs of an incurable weakness. The finer the woof of the lace, the more easily it is torn. The more delicate the train of wheel-work, the more readily it is thrown out of gear. The greater the proportion of open-work in a piece of architecture, the more it will be exposed to the ravages of time.

Matter, weary of having served its master, steals away. Forgetful and indifferent, it transfers its allegiance to another master, only to betray him in turn.

And thus all nature becomes a prey to death—not only the living, but, by a supreme paradox, the inanimate beings as well. The law is pitiless, and death is all the swifter for nature's spoilt and favored children.

Death swoops down more rapidly upon animals than upon the giants of our forests, which are less delicate, less highly specialized, and consequently, more robust. The moisture of an untilled soil supplies them with sustenance. But even the cedar of

Lebanon dies and disappears, as did the generations of little birds which for ages built their nests in its branches.

Inanimate things display still greater power of resistance—to such a degree, in fact, that they are considered, at times, a symbol of life after death. Thus the Chinese enclose within the tomb a fragment of hard jade, which the deceased clasps in his hands as if desirous of clinging to this incorruptible substance—his hope of survival. An illusion, alas, for stones, too, will die. During the lapse of countless centuries, chemical transformations take place within their substance, and here, as elsewhere, perfidious matter will steal away. Water, air, fire, will be subjected to strange transmutations. The river of fire will turn, successively, to ocean, atmosphere, or obscure dust, while awaiting final disaggregation and dissolution.

All nature dies because it reposes upon that shifting and elusive foundation called matter. And man dies, passing away like a shadow, because, no doubt, nature wished to exhaust in him all the perfection of which she is capable.

Yet the whole of man does not die. Unstable and elusive matter was not the only one that furnished material for this masterpiece. Matter can, indeed, take away from man what it gave him, but it can never deprive him of what he holds from another source. The royal munificence which modeled his flesh, his heart, and his brain, can fail him: but the restless flood pauses on the threshold of a world where stability and permanence reign, in the splendor and magnificence of unfailing light.

The billowing flood recedes as it approaches those shores where the spirit dwells. And the spirit—I mean the idea, the intellect, the soul—is indestructible and immortal.

3

Why does this conclusion of our philosophic argument seem to encounter an insuperable obstacle almost at its very birth? The statue is set up, its brow radiant with the splendor of the eternal realms, and already the stone, loosened from the mountain, becomes a menace to the feet of clay.

If the soul, the principle of the intellect and of the idea, is immaterial, how can we account for the strange bond that unites the soul with the material organs of the body?

Abstract and immaterial though the matter of our thoughts be, unfettered though they be by time and space, the slightest disturbance in our bodily organs will impede the flight of the intellect. If the disturbance becomes acute, all intellectual activity ceases. A slight physical discomfort, and behold! our attention begins to flag. A headache, and our mind is almost paralyzed. A lesion of the brain, and all is over; the torch is extinguished; the intellect has fled.

What a triumph for the materialist! What a temptation to retrace one's steps and adopt the theory that the intellect is simply a stage in the evolution of matter, a stage joined to anterior stages by an unbroken link.

What, according to the materialist, is the intellect? Merely a refined state of matter, a transformation of blind instinct and sensible cognition. The proof, we are told, is found in the sterility or annihilation of the intellect when matter withdraws its support.

What are we to answer? Is the decisive proof for the immortality of the soul to crumble into dust before our eyes?

Let us begin by eliminating materialistic evolutionism. Its argument is this: the species, being changeable, proceed from one another by way of successive generation. At one extremity is inorganic matter, then comes the organized cell; at the other extreme are intellect and thought. They offer no proof whatever of continuity between these two extremes; hence, from beginning to end, the same substratum, the same material; matter everywhere, under aspects and in states that are more or less developed.

Shall we lose our way in this labyrinth of generations thus linked by matter? Not at all.

Let us, from the very beginning, take up our position at the point where the majestic stream of uninterrupted generations is supposed to end. And I ask: Upon analysis, do thought and intellect present those special characteristics which we have discovered in them, or do they not?

If the answer is negative, a proof must be forthcoming, and the denial will, I believe, present a rather difficult task.

If the answer is negative, there is no such thing as "continuous" evolution, for evolution even of the most "continuous" sort can never prevail against the conviction that follows upon evidence.

What happened between the moment in which matter began its existence in the inorganic state and the moment in which the abstract and universal idea made its appearance in a series of phenomena? Upon the evolutionist devolves the obligation to explain. Is he absolutely intrenched in his position? Then we reply that, by dint of "continuing," matter has contrived to become immaterial, that is, has acquired properties that contradict its own nature—which appears to be a somewhat original way of "continuing."

But for ourselves, a single consideration weighs in the balance, namely, that the existence of the immaterial is an accepted fact, and it has nothing in common with its opposite, save existence.

Materialistic evolutionism, then, does not solve the problem. Even if—an absurd hypothesis—the intellect had had its origin in matter, the two no longer belong to the same plane; the divorce between them has been consummated and reconciliation is impossible.

After this statement, let us return to the objection. There exists, we are told, an undeniable inter-relation between intellectual activity and the condition of the body.

Agreed. But before taking umbrage at this friendship, which in our estimation seems too exclusive, let us take our stand upon the firm basis of common sense.

All scientific research is vain and doomed to failure if it proceed not rigorously with order and method. For example: A serious and thorough investigation leads us to recognize the evidence of some conclusion. If there should arise a difficulty which seems to be in conflict with the result previously obtained, is it wise to reject the evident conclusion and to decide in favor of the difficulty?

No. What is true, belongs to truth by inalienable right. And along other lines, we have too often occasion to realize the actual limits of our knowledge, to be surprised that a complete grasp of things is once more denied us.

We are now convinced that the immaterial nature of man's life principle flows, as a direct consequence, from the characteristic properties of the idea. The fellowship that we have noticed between our intellectual activity and the sound condition of our bodily organs, cannot, in any hypothesis, suppress or weaken primary evidence. Even though the mystery of this alliance were never to be solved, we should yet be insensates to throw the handle after the hatchet. Countless mysteries surround us—even, and especially, in the domain of science; a mystery, moreover, dwells in our innermost being: ought not this fact to furnish an additional incentive for treasuring the scraps of truth which reason permits us to glean?

We shall return a little later to this elementary rule of common sense, which ought to calm our anxiety. To know what one knows, and to defend it boldly against the panic of the unknown, is true intellectual wisdom.

But, happily, there is a loophole by which we can escape from this state of peaceful expectancy. The soul is imprisoned in the body which it animates. By their union, the two form a single being, whose conjugated parts cannot function one without the other. And for that reason, intellect and thought, although autonomous and independent of the material world, are yet hampered in their activity, if the humble servitors dwelling on the inferior plane of matter refuse their services. In like manner a master of strategy is rendered powerless if his soldiers are dying of hunger.

But it is one thing to act and another to exist. The body cannot exist without the soul, but the soul can exist without the body. Nay more, let the prison-house open, let the body perish: and the soul, still alive, will resume its liberty of action.

A series of comparisons will perhaps enable us to see the possibility of this liberation and the matter of its accomplishment.

The artist, in order to give concrete expression to his ideas, needs an instrument: a brush, a chisel, a violin or an organ. Deprive him of his instrument, and while he will be no less an artist, his inspiration will be confined to himself.

Let us advance a step farther. You are familiar, no doubt, with the history of Beethoven, the greatest of modern musicians. At an early age, he became deaf. And this man, who was destined to inspire thousands of his fellowmen with an ecstatic love of the beautiful, never heard the enchanting harmonies of his finest masterpieces. Is he to be pitied? Who can tell? A genuine artist often experiences sadness and disappointment when his inspiration has taken on material form. And we ourselves, need we be artists to measure the distance which sometimes separates our ideas from the expression which we are endeavoring to give them? An idea throbs, flares up in our feverish brain, takes on shape, and behold! it is robbed of its nobility, disfigured, no longer to be recognized.

Beethoven was deaf. And yet his infirmity did not impede his ascent to the very summit of perfect art. One might say that his affliction had exasperated his genius. He was often seen to run, bare-headed, with hair disheveled, in the open country, then, as if consumed by enthusiasm, fall down at the foot of a tree, and there jot down upon a leaf of his note-book the inspiring theme of a new masterpiece.

How magnificent this vengeance of the soul on the sense organs that had abandoned it! Its exterior activity, seemingly impeded by the faithlessness of its servants, retires, collects its forces within depths inaccessible to surface disturbances, until the compressed thought bursts forth in sheaves of fire.

Let us pursue our comparison to its farthest limit. All is over. Successively, the organs of our bodily senses have ceased to function. The light of the eye is quenched, the ears no longer hear. The delicate mechanism of the internal organs has ceased to function. The nervous system has stopped its vibrations, the brain is paralyzed. Death has come, and the touch of his icy hand stills forever all movement and sensation. The immaterial soul, hunted from covert to covert, pursued without truce or breathing-space, draws back and turns its thoughts inward. It has now reached the threshold of its earthly dwelling. Is it, too, awaiting the sentence of death? No. Its vital and indestructible energy, braced by the defection of the flesh which has abandoned it, collects and concentrates its forces, until its activity, released from restraint, bursts forth and takes its flight toward the higher regions of the eternal and the infinite.

Even as the painter ceases not to be a painter when he no longer has canvas or brush; even as Beethoven's genius avenges his infirmity by creations of beauty; even as Milton, afflicted with blindness, pens his *Paradise Lost*—so the human soul, deprived of its body and of those material organs which, while serving their master, reduced him to servitude, ceases not to be a soul. It has now found its true country, it lives and moves in its element.

Why, then, you ask, is the soul condemned to lead a diminished existence here below? Why this anomaly of a spiritual substance joined to a material organism?

One might as well ask why the earth is round, why water is liquid, or why the stars are luminous, or demand that the infinite and omnipotent God give us an account of His works.

We can imagine a universe in which water exists only in the solid state, in which the earth is cubical in shape, and the stars are non-luminous. But would this universe be better or more comfortable than the one in which we live? It pleased God to make us as we are, and to place us on the confines of two worlds, one material, the other immaterial. This creation was possible, since it exists; it is harmonious, since He planned it; beneficent, since He achieved it. The rest does not concern us.

Let us contemplate that which exists, and accept without reserve the gift, the inalienable right attached to our human nature: the Immortality of our soul.

4

The human soul is immortal! In the light of this truth, every indication, every probability, every certitude gleaned in the course of our previous lectures, stands out in new and bold relief.

The soul is immortal. If so, is it conceivable that in the course of ages humanity never experienced the vibrating appeal, the call of the great Beyond?

Before the birth of philosophers and their systems, before man's formidable and systematic attempt to measure himself, as an equal, against the supreme causes of the universe, could not his intellect, by an obscure presentiment, have obtained a glimpse of the truth?

It is in the history of the ancient religions that we can trace the furrow of this mysterious presentiment. It betrays to us the secret of the thrill felt by all nations and races who are wrestling with destiny. It gives us the key to the unanimous, tenacious, imperishable belief of the human race, which, though unweariedly digging graves, yet proclaims its unwillingness to die.

The soul is immortal. The present life is but an initial episode of a life that will never end. Should we be surprised then to find in man an unsatisfied longing for a happiness which earth has never given nor will ever give him?

Man suffers. Despite his efforts, he remains an incomplete being, and his civilization seems to turn in an endless circle. And when he is sincere with himself, he cannot but look upon the present life as a cruel and inevitable failure, which, to his mind, assumes the proportions of an inexplicable injustice.

What is there at the root of this defiance, of these outbursts of revolt, of these monotonous wails? There is this fact, that man actually possesses the right to a life beyond, and that, in laying claim to the happiness which eludes him and to the justice which seems to betray him, as he obstinately continues to do, he affirms, not only that his intellect is, by its very nature, and therefore necessarily, ordained for absolute Truth, but also that his will is ordained for absolute Good.

From the abysses of the universe there arises another voice which mingles with that of the various religious creeds and with the many voices of human conscience. Were this voice the only one, it would inspire us, perhaps, with as much fear as hope, because the material universe appears to be moved by gigantic forces, and we, imperceptible atoms that we are, feel crushed by their weight.

And yet, the universe fears its solitude, and for that reason calls upon the intellect to become the confidant of its secrets. The intellect will remain the faithful and trusty companion of the cosmos, but only on condition that it be uninfluenced by that strange restlessness which causes all things in the universe, be they living organisms, lands, or suns, to pass away.

The intellect can face the cosmos without trembling, for an inferior has no power to harm a superior essence. The one is material, the other, immaterial. One passes unceasingly from death to life and from life to death, while the other is born but once, never to die.

Lastly, even the testimony of metapsychics, as far as it is reliable, does not escape the rays that emanate from the metaphysical proof for the soul's immortality. For once, both terms harmonize even beyond their agreement in sound.

If the soul is a spirit, if it is not the slave of matter and organs, does it seem so improbable that, at the hour of release from its fleshly prison, the soul has the power to reveal its true nature and energy by means of acts that cannot be explained by exclusively physical causes? After all, would it be so unlikely that, athwart the gates of the death-agony, gates half closed upon this world and half open upon the next, the spiritual soul should emit, at times, a ray of its own light and the effluvium of its own energy?

A flash of lightning it is, as transient as the green rays of sunset, yet a flash of lightning which is possible, since the soul is superior to matter and dwells outside the regions of time and space.

Thus all the other proofs or half-proofs may be grouped around the basic proof and take on greater consistency. And the whole, cemented by the final argument, forms a proof, solid enough to recommend itself to upright and sincere minds for their meditation and conviction.

VII

ETERNITY

We are reaching the term of our investigation. From the standpoint of experience and of philosophical reasoning, we raised the following question: Is there in our being an element that can survive the disintegration of the body, that can exist and live in endless duration after death?

On the precise ground to which we purposely restricted the discussion, we have investigated and explored in various directions the structure of the visible universe, religions, the nature of man, the conditions of his earthly existence, the phenomena of so-called supranormal psychology, and the principles of fundamental metaphysics.

From all sides comes the same answer, although the premises are so varied. It is by its very sameness a strikingly impressive answer. Everything hints, nay, suggests and proves that, to adhere obstinately to a radical materialism, according to which death is the absolute and irrevocable end of our being, is to sin against the light and to oppose the truth.

We do not perish entire. In breathing our last, we liberate a force of personal vitality and energy which by itself is unquenchable and continues to live its own life. Such is the positive conclusion to which our investigation has brought us.

It now remains for us to contemplate the truth thus acquired, and then to draw some practical conclusions from it. Such will be the object of this last lecture.

I

First of all, we must contemplate the idea of life after death and the idea of Immortality.

It is, indeed, one thing to demonstrate the truth of a proposition, and another thing to contemplate a truth acquired through reasoning. Between the two attitudes there is the same difference as between the rough climbing of a mountain and the triumphant gaze with which we survey the glorious panorama to be seen from the summit.

Reasoning is a wonderful instrument in the service of truth. But it is merely an instrument. Too often those who have utilized it declare themselves satisfied if the instrument has worked well in their hands. It would seem that, to their mind, a truth once demonstrated is no longer interesting. They are like those makers of optical instruments who are never curious enough to gaze at the heavens through their wonderful telescopes.

This is both a defect and a danger. Indeed we do not question the intense joy of intellectual research: of motion and effort. But is not contemplation—rest after the struggle—also a source of pure joy? Man's perfection is to be sought, not so much in the pursuit, as in the attainment of his goal.

On the other hand, if we neglect this profound exigency of the mind, we are courting bitter disappointments for the future. Let us candidly confess that the human intellect, left to its own resources, seeks much more than it finds. It feels a sort of shyness in taking possession of its too rare treasures, a shyness that is perhaps more accentuated in our days of overemphasized and almost morbid scepticism. More than ever before, we must become accustomed to, and familiar with, the truths which we have imperiously conjured up by our demonstrations.

In the process of adapting ourselves to a truth, it may happen that new aspects will strike us, thus originating unforeseen difficulties. This is quite natural. We should pass from an excess of pusillanimity to an excess of presumption if we deemed ourselves capable of mastering the whole reality at once. The conquest of truth is not fostered by the tactics of a general attack. It is won only by partial and incessantly repeated attacks. But when the mind has learned how to assimilate the fruit of its early victories, it will not be in danger of yielding easily, should a new obstacle appear in the way. Let us face the fact of immortal life and, come what may, let us hold our positions firmly.

We are, then, immortal. We shall live forever.

Animal and vegetable life, after millions of years, will have deserted our planet, but we shall still be living.

Where shall we be? It matters not—philosophically speaking—where we shall be, having resisted the cruel maw of Time, which, according to the old figure of mythological legend, mercilessly devours all its children.

For centuries the huge, dark orb of the sun will have been immersed to the darkness of space, and we shall still be living.

Our own sphere also will have been crushed into dust—the dust of old age or the burnt-up debris of a fantastic conflagration—and we shall still be living.

After incalculable durations, in the immensity of stellar space, the nebulæ one after another will have achieved their slow evolution. They will have blossomed into clusters of thousands upon thousands of stars. And each star, obedient to its destiny, will reach the utmost limit of its own activity—a ruddy blaze, a bloody tear lighting up the night—before its final extinction. And we, ephemeral atoms of a world long gone and forgotten, shall still be alive.

Owing to the play of the combinations of matter, the whole face of the Universe will have been renewed—how many times?—each period reckoned in hundreds of thousands of years; and we, impassible, unchanged, shall still be living.

And if—an impossible hypothesis—the infinitely remote day were to come when the last atom would exhaust its last spark of energy and the world would return to the primeval indetermination of impalpable ether, we should still be there—we whose life passed as lightning in the majestic evolution of countless cosmic periods, more inconceivable and still more real than the Kalpas and the Mantaras of the old Hindu philosophers.

Does not our whole being thrill as we contemplate, under this rather crude light, the idea of life after death and Immortality?

The thought of death gives us the thrill of annihilation; that of Immortality gives us the thrill of endless duration. And, strange, in each case the result is identical. Anguish oppresses our heart, and we catch ourselves saying: No, this cannot be.

This shrinking of our mind has been expressed by some thinkers of our age with passion; others have spoken of it sarcastically. Let us sum up their objections, without attenuating them in the least:

"This immortality which mankind is pleased to vindicate with childish obstinacy, is an exorbitant privilege. Why such a unique exception to the universal law? Must not all that begins come to an end? At a definite moment, human individuality enters into the series of phenomena, the succession of which constitutes the history of the Cosmos. It is a useless and superfluous expedient to imagine a subtle principle—called spiritual, for the sake of the case—thanks to which an individual, by a process of dualism, would escape the implacable law of transformation and destruction. This principle reminds us of a clever circus-rider who, when his horse falls under him, leaps on another and continues his course. Does the principle belong to our world or not? To say that it does not, is equivalent to acknowledging that it has no existence, for the world is constituted by all the beings actually endowed with existence. And if it belongs to the world, then it falls under its laws. It tends to final destruction, and the pseudo-life-after-death which mankind attributes to itself with such generosity is but the problematic and illusory delay which it cowardly grasps before taking the definite leap into annihilation.

Formerly men could flatter themselves that this conclusion was avoidable. Was not the law of the conservation of energy erected into a scientific dogma, embracing the whole universe? But to-day Science is much less dogmatic. It acknowledges having extended the consequences of a partial truth too universally. The law of the conservation of energy it replaces by another, vaster and more synthetic than the former—the law of the dissipation of energy.

Whatever may be its nature, is not the animating principle of the human being a source and spring of energy? Therefore it necessarily obeys the law of the dissipation of energy. It wears out and fades away, and we have not even the consolation of believing that, in wearing out, this energy is recuperated elsewhere to produce another system and another spring.

At best, it would be a meager consolation. For it would have to be ascertained whether this new centre has any resemblance with the former. What would it matter to the doctrine of life-after-death if the individual energies, after being dissociated, would again make up an individuality, a stranger to that which constitutes our actual Ego? This was the insoluble objection which, one and twenty centuries ago, was made to the Buddhistic theory of *skandas*. But this hypothesis does not fall within our province. The human soul being, we do not say, of *this* world, but of *the* world, is destined to fade away like the world and to disappear as the eddy of a swift, ephemeral torrent.

But let us suppose that these primordial difficulties are solved. The inconceivable privilege is granted us by a special decree of Nature or Providence. We shall resist this wearing out which little by little consumes the whole universe, from atoms to suns. Let us rejoice! We are immortal. But is not this gift rather embarrassing? What can be done with endless existence? Either we shall remain in the state which is ours at death or we shall pursue the progressive course of our Ego that was begun on earth.

The former of the two prospects is not very attractive. Moreover, mankind does not seem to stop at such rather disappointing prospects of life-after-death. And rightly so. It is granted that man is Nature's masterpiece. But is this masterpiece perfect? From the physical, moral, and intellectual standpoints, are not its limitations evident? With the endowment of his five senses, is man sufficiently equipped to conquer the universe? Would not his quest be furthered by some added senses? He has, it is true, an intellect. But since the fate of the mind is bound up here on earth with the services rendered by the sense organs, have not the limitations of those senses a deep influence on the disappointments of the mind? There is nothing about which we know all. In every age such has been the cry of sincere thinkers. As to the moral point of view, let us grant that it can reckon fewer failures and more successes. But how very few are those who do not take away from their sojourn on earth an inveterate remnant of narrow prejudices, bad habits, poorly conquered passions, and the heavy burden of a will scarcely confirmed in well-doing?

And is it with this knapsack of ignorance and misery forever strapped on his back, that man must face everlasting duration? This would be horrible, and Immortality, thus understood, would be the most undesirable of gifts. Annihilation would be far preferable to it.

The prospect is much too disconcerting. Let us grant a great deal. Human Immortality is resplendent, we suppose, with the beneficent glories of progress. But in what does this progress consist? Have the defenders of absolute Immortality thought of the paradoxical situation created for the incorruptible Ego by this grant of endless duration, even on the hypothesis of progress after death?

The Universe is an object of intellectual knowledge. As it is governed by unchangeable laws, the hour will come when, by dint of study, the immortal being will understand it. It will take time, no doubt. But time will not be wanting, since man is immortal. However long a time you may suppose necessary for acquiring knowledge of the Cosmos, if that time be compared with eternity, does it not appear as a mere drop of water in the ocean? Behold, this immortal being has now mastered this supreme "axiom," this unique "equation," which, doubtless, contains the reason for all that exists. What then? "*Assueta vilescunt,*" declares the wisdom of the ages. When the mind will have nothing further to learn, a terrible ennui will yawn on the Universe, despoiled of the halo which in our eyes—ignorant beings that we are, and morbidly eager to progress forever—gives it the best and most attractive of its charms, namely, the unknown and the mysterious.

If the mind were both perfectible and immortal, the Universe, by the constancy of its laws, could not supply an indefinitely new food to its exigencies.

Considerations from the moral order would not bring us much farther. Ethics proclaims, as a principle of justice, that each one will receive according to his works. Evil calls for punishment, virtue for reward. When man will have received the latter or be visited with the former beyond the grave, what further reason will he have for tarrying in existence?

Furthermore, if Immortality is considered as a progress, it seems that a day must come when moral evil will have disappeared, and ignorance will have faded away. Man, taught by experience and suffering, will sooner or later come back to the right path, which is to live in conformity with his nature. After all, men are bound to be good. However highly the merit of acquired virtue may be esteemed, what proportion can it have with the prodigious reward of an eternity of happiness? The disproportion is patent, nay, crushing.

It is vain to resort to the Christian conception of the problem of destiny. This conception we admit or we do not. Should we admit it, we would not be much better off. As we well know, Christian doctrine offers a very simple solution to all our antinomies. It assigns as a goal to the human soul, the direct and immediate possession of God. Now, God being the real Infinite, it is evident that, to enjoy such a good, everlasting life would not be superfluous. But, while this doctrine settles the problem for the believer, it fails to do so for the philosopher, because human destiny, as Christians conceive it, is not, by their own avowal, a right of nature, but a gratuitous grace. God could have refused that grace, leaving human nature to follow its normal course. Hence the problem remains untouched, unless we claim that the "supernatural" is strictly demanded by nature. This, however, would be an erroneous claim and, as we know, Catholic thinkers would unanimously protest against it. Therefore it remains for us to ascertain what use the soul would have made of Immortality if it had remained in its natural state. The question is the more serious since, according to the opinion of theologians, grace does not destroy nature, but presupposes it, and builds its own edifice upon it. If nature protests against the exorbitant privilege of an immortal duration, does not the Christian theory crumble to pieces?

2

I think I have condensed in the above paragraphs the entire list of objections of sceptical unbelief on the subject under investigation. Are these objections strong enough to shake our conviction? To answer them, must we again set on a new and arduous enquiry?

Nothing of the sort. After we review the notions previously acquired, the light will spring up.

In the first place, we can dispel the equivocation which, like cement of inferior quality, holds this building together with negative arguments.

We are saying nothing new when we remark that the modern mind, philosophical or scientific, inclines towards Monism. The horizon of the knowable expands exclusively within the plane of matter; nothing exists which is not an integral part of the material world. The latter is self-sufficient and jealously repels the intervention of any reality external to itself.

Starting from this initial view, it is easy, as we were doing before, to state the dilemma: Either the animating principle of man belongs to the Universe, or it does not. On the former hypothesis, it originates, develops, and disappears in common with all that exists. On the latter hypothesis, it does not exist.

But if such a simplifying view be rejected, the problem takes on another aspect.

Does the human soul belong to the Universe? Yes, if by these words we mean that it partakes of that elementary and universal condition called existence. But that the soul belongs to the Universe in the sense that it shares the condition of material and visible things, we flatly refuse to admit.

This we are forced to do by the evidence. The monist, who reduces all things to the level of matter, is no more reasonable than the chemist who, starting from the preconceived principle that everything in the Universe is carbon and oxygen, would refuse to acknowledge the existence of other bodies. It is vain for the monists to repeat in every conceivable manner that in the Universe everything is "matter," "energy," that energy is subject to the law of dissipation or the law of conservation, or that radioactivity is about to revolutionize science. Such affirmations are extremely interesting as far as the material world is concerned; but when we study the problem of human destiny, to say that they do not disturb us is a weak statement: frankly, we ignore them. Mind is not matter, and the soul does not belong to the material Universe—that is all.

We are "dualists," and not "monists," with good reasons to support our choice.

And we are not in the least moved by the fantastic figures with which the monists imagine they can reduce to absurdity the concept of Immortality.

In childhood, the study of arithmetic taught us that only things of the same denomination can be added. In other words, it is nonsense to compare different orders of realities, whilst forgetting the essential characteristics by which they are opposed to each other.

The human soul, owing to its immaterial nature, has nothing in common with time or space. To pretend to measure its duration, *i. e.*, its persistence in being, with a yardstick taken from the material world, is like trying to add up one oak tree and one automobile.

A thing may "last," develop, grow, evolve, without being at all subject to the laws of time if, by its nature, it is a stranger to things governed and measured by time.

You may pile up thousands and millions and billions of centuries, as many as you like; in a fantasmagoric vision, you may conjure up the procession of nebulæ and stars, of geological periods, of future cataclysms; then, upon this terribly slow procession of countless ages, let fall the prophetic "still living," by which process you are pleased to think that by contrast the paradoxical human "atom," which alone would remain motionless in the midst of the immense vortex, does explode and is exploded: by so doing, you make a wonderful effort of imagination, to which, however, nothing real corresponds. The soul is "still living" indeed, but not with calendar dates can its life be measured. The material world has its course in time because it is material. The human soul remains, but is not subject to the flux of time, because it is immaterial. Those are two distinct and irreducible orders.

Would anyone have a right to be surprised that such a simple idea is not accepted in an age when so many indulge in intellectual somersaults, in order to revive notions which up to the present have been considered irreformable? We ask the question in all sincerity: Which is more difficult for the mind, to conceive a universe with two or four dimensions, or to admit this elementary principle, that to different conditions of existence correspond, from the standpoint of duration, different modes of valuation? No one needs Einstein's brain to understand that.

It is enough not to start from the *a priori* idea that the stuff of things is but one, and that to belong to the world means to share necessarily in the conditions and habits of matter.

This first group of difficulties need not detain us any longer. It is a fact that the human soul is endowed with Immortality.

But, if it is, does not the second group of objections retain all its disconcerting force?

What can be the use of this onerous burden of eternal duration?

That the solution of this problem should be considered from the angle of pure reason, and on the hypothesis that mankind would have pursued its natural destiny, we willingly grant. It is quite exact, as Christian doctrine teaches, that grace does not destroy nature. Hence, we must find in nature the basis of possible agreement with the new state created by supernatural revelation. It is a serious mistake (unfortunately not always avoided) to present man's postulates as a kind of necessity, a *Deus ex machina* conveniently interfering to pull human nature out of a hole. The natural order has its intrinsic value. It is complete in itself. To imagine it differently, as a lame and mutilated creation, would be to insult both the wisdom of the Creator and the absolutely gratuitous character of His gifts.

Divine Wisdom, did I say? Those words bring us back to the very core of the problem.

A most disastrous consequence of the "monistic" tendency consists in eliminating from the field of speculation the idea of God, the infinite and necessary being, author of the world and distinct from it.

If the material universe constitutes, as it were, a closed cycle, having its explanation in itself, it is not the spiritual reality of the soul which alone is excluded from this succession of forces and phenomena, but it is also the spiritual reality *par excellence*, *i. e.*, God.

Once this exclusion against God has been pronounced, it is easy to conceive the boundless disquiet of man struggling to scrutinize what is in store for him beyond the grave.

Carried away as a straw by the impetuous and blind wave of an evolution over which no intelligent thought presides, he has reason to be afraid. Logically enough, he considers the tremendous honor which is to be bestowed upon him with unspeakable terror.

The question of individual Immortality is senseless on the hypothesis of a Universe exclusively restricted to phenomena of the material order. At this point the principle already formulated assumes its implacable rigor. Whatever begins, comes to an end. The only possible case would be that of a terrible caprice of blind and deaf Nature leaving us, even after death, a shred of life, a temporary and tenuous shred, since earthly death would be nothing more than an incurable wound from which we would die, definitively this time, in some unknown corner of space.

The prospect would have very little to gladden our heart. It conjures up the strange destiny of those "astral shells" which theosophists are pleased to identify with appearances at Spiritistic séances. But is not a universe constantly in the travail of physico-chemical combinations, capable of anything?

Let us quit this field of morbid and monstrous dreams. We merely wished to show that the objection, "Of what use can immortality be?" is very poorly put.

The moment you admit even the hypothesis of Immortality, you renounce the materialistic hypothesis and restore to God His place at the summit of creation—a necessary place, for God also is spirit.

It is outside the scope of this work to recall the proofs for the existence of a personal and almighty God, Creator and Ruler of the Universe. But it is not irrelevant to explain why the intervention of God entirely modifies the data of the problem regarding the use that would be made of Immortality.

It may be that our intellectual curiosity does not perceive with absolute precision what we should do with endless duration, if our destiny had its natural course. But with the firmest certitude we can affirm that Immortality would prove neither too heavy a burden for us, nor an undesirable benefit.

Since God is foreseeing, He does not act in a haphazard way; and since He is good, He does not destine beings who are the work of His hands for an impossible end. If, then, it has pleased Him to call out of nothingness a creature marked with the seal of Immortality, we may rest assured that such a creature, if it does not deflect from the right path, will never have cause to regret having received such a blessing from the divine bounty.

This answer might suffice to calm our fears. Should we wish to go farther and draw aside the mysterious veil that shows us the unfathomable depths of eternity, we might proceed as follows, to establish the main lines of investigation:

What conditions man's destiny? We reply that it is his soul, his mind, his will—in short, his spiritual nature. It is easy, then, to determine the goal towards which he tends, which the superior activity of his being can reach.

This goal can only be God Himself, known and loved as He can be known and loved only by a nature capable of reflecting and endowed with free will.

Coming from God, the whole creation returns to Him. Through man it returns to God consciously. In any case, the *raison d'être* of man is to lend a voice to the wonderful symphony written by the Creator into His creation.

Thus falls the objection which pretends to throw us into the abyss of an immortality without object and without support.

The soul does not die. Nor does God die. The persistence of the soul is therefore justified, as long as God exists.

But you may say: If the term of Immortality is of itself limitless, does not a limit appear as soon as we reckon with the means at our disposal to enter into communication with this term?

We cannot reach God immediately, as is done in the supernatural order. No face-to-face vision, no direct communion with the infinite Being is possible. The divine image is made up of and rendered integral, if we may use the expression, with the rays refracted through the prism of creation. Creation, however vast it may be, is finite. It can give but a finite, incomplete image of God. And when, after having investigated all the worlds, man has been able to ascertain all that can be known of his Creator, will he not stop fatally, conscious of his inability, immobilized in his ignorance? And, from the moment he is thus motionless, will not Immortality again become for him an obsession, a fatigue, a despair? Moreover, who is this bard, lending his voice to a creation the downfall of which is noised abroad by science? Who is this solitary, lost in the desert of nothingness, this pontiff without followers, this king without a realm? The heavens proclaim God's glory, and man sings to God the glory of the heavens. But the heavens are no more, and the dust of extinguished worlds floats in the everlasting night of exhausted and barren spaces.

Let us not be alarmed. True, man, in obedience to his natural destiny, cannot dream of knowing God as He is, or rather such as a face-to-face vision would reveal Him to us. Man's knowledge on this side of the grave is forever limited. But let us rest assured that this limit, willed by God Himself, could not be the cause of intolerable anguish. Regret, desire perhaps; but despair, never.

Above all, let us not conclude from this limitation that man's natural progress in the knowledge of God would be brusquely stopped in its soaring. Let us not be pusillanimous; let us not act like those good people who have never left their native village and gauge the world by the limits of their narrow mind.

That the laws of nature are immutable, I grant. And I have no wish to take up again the well-known discussions on this subject. I will merely observe that the immutability of the laws of nature does not prevent an infinite diversity of application on our earth. What prodigious variety is revealed to us in all the degrees of being! In the world about us, at every step, a harvest of unsuspected marvels is conjured up to our dazzled sight. The scientist, bending over his microscope, experiences an ever renewed surprise as he contemplates the delicate structure of diatoms which, in the space of a millionth part of a square millimeter, develop a more elaborate and no less artistic architecture than the most beautiful rose windows of our cathedrals. And the diversity of those architectural structures, which are imperceptible to the naked eye, is such that a whole lifetime would not suffice to decipher them. And yet those are but shells and the debris of dead organisms.

If we examine life itself, to discover its many manifestations, to unravel the secret and the coördination of the organs which it places at the service of its exuberant activity, this task can only be the work of whole generations of patient truth-seekers.

We could multiply instances showing that our small terrestrial world is too vast and rich for this lightning flash, called human life, to reveal a thousandth part of the ideas which the divine Intelligence has realized there.

To the spiritualistic philosopher each of those marvels, great or small, is like the facet of a wonderful diamond, in which is reflected an aspect of the splendor, beauty, and knowledge of God. And who would dare maintain that, having exhausted the study of these countless facets, the human soul would not have accomplished some progress in the knowledge and love of God?

The earth is an inexhaustible treasure. And still, it is but a very small gem in the jewel-casket of the worlds. We have no reason to reject the belief that the suns, so profusely sprinkled through the universe, help the development of life and beauty on other planets like ours, but not identical with ours. For it is highly probable that in their case the processes of inorganic or living beings are not rigorously patterned after that of our little terrestrial isle. Conditions and surroundings change, and the festival of light begins again on another plane. Each one brings out its share of marvels, in which the genius of God sparkles under an ever-renewed splendor.

And how many times does this festival of light begin again? As often as it pleases God to manifest His thought outwardly. And as God's thought is bound by no limits, how can a limit be assigned to it by the puny minds of men?

The Universe will end, you may say, and with it the blaze of the marvelous jewel-casket will be extinguished. Perhaps. But what proves that this end will be an end forever? God's thought is not limited. Nor is His might. For one sun that dies out, ten others can be enkindled. For one universe that dies, ten others are born; and they may differ from those that are no longer, even more than those differed from one another when they were in existence.

But while universes pass away, their memory remains; and that memory, embellished with the ever-renewed contributions of the present, gradually makes up and brings out the sublime image of the Creator, with a continuity which no cataclysm can ever interrupt.

This is not all. We who refuse to accept the narrow postulates of materialistic Monism may catch a glimpse of other immaterial universes beyond this material Universe of ours. By this I mean the society of souls or spirits whose existence is above doubt, since we ourselves are members of that society. Why may there not be other human families like ours, at least in the *ensemble* of their spiritual faculties? Why may not those human families gather together after death to commune, all of them, in one and the same aspiration, in one and the same language: that of mind and ideas?

Since the spectacle of the visible Universe invincibly suggests the concept of order and hierarchy, why may not the hierarchy of creatures, above all those human families ascending from all the points of heaven, be crowned by the legions of pure spirits who never experienced contact with matter?

Theology explains the nature of those superior beings, whose ideas, instead of being laboriously extracted from the rough envelope of sense realities, are the direct gift and, as it were, the flower of divine intellectuality. Theologians further explain how, in their schools, the total synthesis—both philosophical and positive—of the world is elaborated with a facility and amplitude unknown to our congenital indigence. They tell you also how those elder brothers in the great spiritual family are tenderly bending over us younger members, the Benjamins of the society of minds.

And when you finally realize the concept of those two universes, of which you are the blending and the living articulation—the material Universe, each part of which renders the splendors of heaven irridescent, as a translucent dust might do; and the immaterial Universe, with its inexpressible power condensed, as it were, in its ascensions—the simplicity of the creative idea and love; when you reflect that there is no limit to these two universes, at least on the part of God, who can, at will, incessantly increase or renew them; you will see, I hope, the spectre of an undying ennui fade away forever.

To this prospect, Christianity adds another. On the hypothesis of a state of nature, man rises towards a goal which determines his effort, but which in fact he will never attain, because God in Himself is inaccessible.

Christianity levels this last obstacle and places the human soul face to face with God.

At first sight it might seem that the two concepts of life after death are mutually exclusive. But more thorough investigation shows that it is not so.

The knowledge of the first Cause obtained through its effects, is one thing; the knowledge of this same cause in itself, is another. The latter does not exclude the former, nor does it make it superfluous.

It does not exclude it, for the intuitive knowledge of God is so transcending and incommunicable that it leaves to reason, with its exigent demands, all its native aptitudes and curiosity.

It does not render it superfluous, because God, outside the adoration and love connatural to the intimate union of souls with Him, has also a right to the adoration and love of His creatures in the natural order—those creatures of which man remains the psalmist and interpreter, and, in the sense already explained, the immortal witness.

I will not tarry longer on a subject which leads us into the field of faith and theology. But it was not useless to indicate, at least summarily, how the connection between the Christian and the rational concepts of life after death is made. These two concepts are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

3

Having concluded this protracted discussion, we can hardly refrain from a feeling of surprise and almost of sadness.

What trouble, indeed, must we not undergo to convince ourselves that death is not the end of all things, but a portal opening on vistas of life, beauty, and happiness beyond the grave!

At times we may ask ourselves: Which appears more terrible to man—to die or to survive?

Reduced to this terse dilemma, the strangeness of the case is shown to be unlikely. Indeed it is impossible that we should be afraid to survive.

Should we be deterred by the frailty of our deductions on a subject which offers so slight a grip for our senses?

What right have we to inflict on our reason, of which we are so proud, the humiliation of being unable to meet and solve the most essential of all problems—that of our destiny?

I admire the superb confidence and bold firmness with which scientists scrutinize molecules and dissect atoms. Might you not be led to suppose that they have perceived both in the luminous field of their microscopes? Yet none of them has ever seen or probably ever will see either a molecule or an atom.

I wonder at the tranquil security with which those same scientists, equipped with spectroscopes, describe the chemical composition of stars situated trillions of miles away. A dark or a bright band appears, and behold, they know that such and such a body is there. Yet they never saw that body, nor will they ever see it.

Willy-nilly, modern Science is the triumph of the invisible, of that invisible which revolutionizes appearances and at times forbids us to accept, without criticism, the crude testimony of our senses.

The sun seems to revolve around the earth. Not so: it is the earth that revolves around the sun. The stars seem to be golden points tacked in the azure vault. Not so: the heavenly vault does not exist, and the stars are enormous globes. We on earth have the sensation of immobility. Not so: we are rolling through space at a dizzy speed. Matter (in the ordinary sense of the word) seems heavy. Not so: if it were to become independent of the attraction that draws it, its weight would be nil. It seems to us inert. Not so: matter is a conflict of neutralized energies. . . .

I repeat that modern Science is the stupefying revelation of the invisible. And still this revelation is accepted by us; and we give it a place in our thoughts.

Backed up by indications and proofs no less decisive than those on which Science bases its conclusions in proclaiming its discoveries, the reality of this invisible, fitly called "the other" world, imposes itself on our reason. Are we to shrink from accepting it?

Without any disdain for Science or its votaries, without any bitterness against them, I may be permitted to say that such an attitude is as little "up-to-date" or "scientific" as possible. Let us be up-to-date indeed; but let us also be logical.

But perhaps the fear of the invisible is due to deeper causes.

If we survive, if we are immortal, we are brought back to a belief that is as old as the world, taken up, clarified, developed, intensified by Christianity—a belief that our present life is the preface to a future life. Not a conventional preface, the kind generally written after the book is finished, but a real preface in which the book is announced, the idea introduced, defined, and sketched.

To Christians with solid faith I have nothing to teach. They know their duty and their responsibilities. I am deliberately addressing unbelievers.

They protest that we cannot accept the Christian solution of the problem of destiny, and still less the conception of the present life which flows from it.

I am not curious enough to ask: Why? The fact that you oppose the Christian solution is amply sufficient for my present argument.

Unless I am mistaken, this resistance implies an affirmation of your right to free-thought. You loudly vindicate the liberty of rejecting such or such a doctrine which does not suit your taste. I have nothing to say to this. But if you defend your liberty of thought with such jealous care and are so touchy and harsh about it, why not at the same time admit just plain liberty?

I even dare to say that in so doing you would be more consistent.

Thought, I mean real thought, is never free. When dealing with a proposition that is self-evident, the mind cannot evade the evidence. If it does so, it is owing to the intervention of the will.

Therefore, when you proclaim yourselves freethinkers, by that very fact—whether or not this manifestation is opportune does not matter here—you acknowledge that you possess what constitutes man's highest prerogative: free will.

Free you are indeed, and consequently master of your own acts, and responsible for them.

This being so, does it seem impossible for you to shoulder the responsibility for your destiny?

You are not carried along by an irresistible current. In the series of phenomena determined by merely physical causes, you may insert a force of reaction capable of modifying at once your personality and the world in which you live.

After all, what is civilization but a conquest and a triumph of liberty? What are scientific, artistic, and social progress but affirmations of liberty? In fine, what is that inner voice of conscience of which we have spoken at length, that voice which, without inflicting any material constraint on you, dictates to you the imperative obligation of duty—what is it but an expression of liberty?

You are free. Beware. For, if you are and since you are free, you cannot find it strange that a defective use of so delicate an instrument as liberty may bring disastrous consequences upon you.

Do you wish more precise statements? Here they are. The programme of human life is defined by a collection of moral precepts. With regard to them, the least that can be said is that they respond and are adapted to the condition and exigencies of human nature. Whosoever frees himself from those precepts, twists his human nature; and since he twists it deliberately, it is but just that he should bear the consequences of his wilful act. As human wisdom teaches, an initial error is the worst of all errors. An error in switching a train may be hardly noticeable at first, but ultimately it may bring the train to a point quite remote from its intended destination.

Consider, and you will realize that, even from the natural point of view, it is not indifferent for your eternal destiny that you choose from the very start the road you have to travel, the road of truth and virtue.

I return to a thought expressed before. May it not be that the fear of the invisible is also the fear of the responsibilities which are due for a settlement in the future life? To free yourselves from this terrible fear, there is but one means: do not sin against the light, and be good. Your fate in the hereafter will be what you yourselves will have made it. It is you who determine it during those fleeting moments of your pilgrimage on earth. The eternal Judge will but express your own verdict.

I have considered only the hypothesis of the merely natural order. But if, influenced by these modest talks of mine, you grasp this merely philosophical solution, it is my wish and hope that you may go farther and, after so many wanderings, drop the anchor of your legitimate and consoling hopes in the haven of integral Truth.

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